

Educating Children for Democracy

The Journal of the International Step by Step Association



A Decade of Steps in Educational Reform

Number 8, 10th Anniversary Issue, November 2004

Educating Children for Democracy, the professional journal of the International Step by Step Association, is intended for teachers of children from birth through age ten, faculty who instruct preschool and/or primary school teachers, and other educational professionals interested in child-centered teaching methods. The journal emphasizes change and educational transformation, based on the experience of countries in transition, and addresses the continuing challenge for all democracies to provide the kinds of educational experiences that will ensure the continuation of open and free societies.



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The International Step By Step Association (ISSA) is a non-governmental membership organization established in the Netherlands to foster democratic principles and promote parent and community involvement in early childhood education. ISSA's vision is of an open society where the entire community helps children to reach their full potential and where children are active participants in the learning process.

ISSA combines the strengths of thirty organizations in as many countries, reaching over 200,000 preschool and primary teachers, as well as caregivers, parents, school directors, psychologists, community leaders, and local and national education officials. Step by Step Programs currently reach well over one million children and their families. ISSA's members cooperate to advocate for equal access to quality education for all children; engage in national reform of early childhood education systems; develop new teacher resources; provide training; encourage research; implement national, regional, and international projects; and provide a forum for educators, experts, and policy makers to share knowledge and experience.

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**Educating Children
for Democracy**

*The Journal of the
International Step by
Step Association*

Number 8,
10th Anniversary
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1993

Welcome to the 10th Anniversary Issue

Program Development

George Soros decides to undertake a major initiative in early childhood development (ECD), initially intended to last two years.

Participating Soros Foundation offices select local staff for implementation of the program.

OSI contracts with Georgetown University Child Development Center to develop a methodology, training modules, and to assemble training teams which will provide long term technical assistance to country teams.

Network Development

All major training sessions are held in one location with the goal of building a strong professional network among participants across borders.

As we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Step by Step Program, it is important to look back at our unique accomplishments and to look forward to the new challenges and opportunities facing the International Step by Step Association (ISSA).

The Step by Step Program began with generous funding from George Soros, a huge idea, and a handful of people in 15 countries who were willing to transform these ingredients into a powerful force in 30 countries. Getting there was not easy. It would be safe to say that everyone working on the project considered it a blessing—and a burden. While it was certainly a very exciting opportunity and challenge to advance the cause of education for young children, it also became an unending struggle to accomplish the improbable on a timeline that seemed impossible. But we did it, because we believed in it, because we saw the dramatic impact of what we were doing, and because we had each other. This is the time to acknowledge and thank everyone who participated in this huge effort—the Soros Foundations that supported it, the inexhaustible Step by Step teams, and the unending support of all of those who provided not only technical support but cheerleading that was very much needed along the way.

Here we all are now, and the statistics seem overwhelming—almost too much to really grasp. We now have ISSA, a strong international membership organization, and a network of independent Step by Step organizations that separately and together advocate on behalf of high quality early childhood education, stressing its importance and the implications of its absence for the future of the children and the countries in which they live.

Having started in 1994 in 252 classrooms across the 15 participating countries, in ten years we have reached millions of children and 220,000 teachers, and 480 teacher training institutions have benefited from Step by Step. New policies are in place due to our efforts—kindergartens saved from closure, the rights of children of minorities and special needs supported.

We should pause, look around, and celebrate ourselves and each other because we deserve it and have earned it. But then, once again, we have to pick up our shared responsibilities—because our services are still needed in our countries, and there are millions of children in other countries still waiting for attention from us. And as always, we will rise to that challenge, because we have ownership of what we have already learned, and we have each other.

We look to the next ten years and all that is yet to come.

Elizabeth Lorant
Director of Children and Youth Programs
Open Society Institute, New York

Member, ISSA Board of Directors

Stepping into the Future: A History of the Step by Step Program

by Sarah Klaus, Executive Director, International Step by Step Association, Budapest, Hungary *

The Step by Step Program, originally called the Soros Preschool Project, was envisioned as a two-year initiative to introduce child-centered teaching methods and family involvement in the early childhood education systems of fifteen countries in Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe. Ten years on, Step by Step has developed into the International Step by Step Association (ISSA), a network of 30 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) engaged in large-scale national reform and regional advocacy initiatives.

In 1993, Canadian physician Dr. Frasier Mustard met investor and philanthropist George Soros, founder of the Open Society Institute (OSI).¹ The purpose of the meeting was to discuss strategies for Soros' new regional university in Central Europe but, significantly, discussion soon turned to early childhood development. Mustard argued the case for the critical role of early childhood in the development of open societies so convincingly that

Soros later decided to invest \$100+ million to launch the new initiative.

The resulting scheme aimed to introduce child-centered preschool models and replicate these new approaches through existing government teacher training systems. This pilot project developed into ISSA, now an independent network of 30 national NGOs united in their vision to promote the right of each child to meet his or her full potential. Serving children from



1994

Original Step by Step Countries

Albania, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Ukraine, Yugoslavia

Program Development

First six-week training and school visits in Washington, DC, for 15 countries and 30 participants.

Trainers conduct in-country training for teachers during the summer.

Network Development

All major training sessions are held in one location with the goal of building a strong professional network among participants across borders.

Participants begin sharing ideas and materials.

First annual meeting held in Budapest to plan for future.

Program Expansion

15 original countries

252 preschool classrooms open

1995

New Step by Step Countries

Kyrgyzstan, Slovenia

Program Development

Huge expansion in preschool classrooms in all countries.

Contest to re-name the program.

Macedonia wins with Step by Step (SbS).

Network Development

Training continues in regional settings for the new ECD network.

Annual meetings continue to support network development.

Program Expansion

17 countries active in network.

980 preschool classrooms in operation.

birth to the age of ten, ISSA implements a variety of innovative education reform projects, all based on child-centeredness and direct community engagement.

ISSA and its members have trained and mentored over 220,000 early childhood professionals and implemented programs that reach millions of young children and families across the 30 participating countries. ISSA has also assisted in extensive, influential policy reform.

As a consequence of its dual aim of promoting optimal development for all children and supporting establishment of a strong, active third sector in early childhood education, Step by Step has played a major role in early childhood education reform in Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe; Central Asia; Mongolia; and Haiti. It is also embarking on new initiatives in countries such as Argentina.

Core Principles of the Step by Step Program:

- Equal access to education and care opportunities
- Child-centered, individualized teaching and learning
- Development of skills for life-long learning and participation in a democracy
- Teachers as facilitators
- Parent involvement
- Community engagement in public education
- Culturally-appropriate learning environments and approaches
- Ongoing professional development

Step by Step has evolved dynamically. Initially a comprehensive initiative that included early education, medical, health, and social services, rapid expansion in the late 1990s led to the program re-focusing on early childhood education. Renovation and humanitarian assistance (such as food and medicine for preschools) were assigned to other donors and partners, while Step by Step concentrated its efforts almost exclusively on development of human capacity at all levels: Country Teams,² teacher trainers, school/preschool directors, parent advocates, teachers, children.

On its tenth anniversary, this article goes behind the scenes of the Step by Step Program, describing the milestones and key decisions that shaped its development and evaluating its challenges and successes.

Establishing Roots: the Core Principles of the Step by Step Program

To launch the project, staff of the Children & Youth Department of the Open Society Institute were tasked with designing a program. Elizabeth Lorant engaged experts involved in the US Head Start Program based at Georgetown University. The project planning team devised a program based on three criteria:

- Assessments of the current situation of children and early childhood education in the initial 15 participating countries³
- Experiences and research from the US's comprehensive Head Start Program
- OSI's emphasis on promotion of an active civil society

Initial country assessments revealed a regional decline in social services and infrastructure for young

children and their families. As economies plummeted, enterprises going through the painful process of privatization closed affiliated preschools.⁴ Basic maintenance funding for remaining childcare centers was eliminated. Soaring unemployment meant trained caregivers and social service workers lost their jobs. The entire structure of the social service system for families with young children was crumbling.

In this environment, it made sense to support children and families by strengthening services provided through the remaining preschools. These schools once formed the core of enviable systems of childcare that existed prior to the breakup of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and the velvet revolutions in Central Europe. The Soros Preschool Project (as it was still called) offered a model of integrated care for young children and their families, linking educational, medical, and social services. Like the Head Start model in the United States on which it was based, the project was designed to improve access for at-risk children.

The project focused on OSI's core mission, the strengthening of civil society, by introducing child-centered teaching methods and family and community engagement in early childhood programs. Teachers accustomed to delivering didactic instruction to the whole class would learn how to facilitate children's learning through play, to develop individual and small group instruction to meet the needs of each child, to promote choice and responsibility in the classroom, and to actively involve parents who had previously been excluded from the preschool education of their children.

Core program principles (see table, page 4) were incorporated into a methodology manual for teachers, prepared by the Georgetown University

team. The manual was adapted in each country and approved for implementation by national ministries.

A pilot experiment brought teams of early childhood educators to the United States for a six-week orientation and training visit. Selected pilot sites were provided with funds for renovation. They received furniture and educational materials for two classrooms and a parent room and funds to hire additional teaching assistants and a family coordinator. Funding was provided to replenish classroom supplies, initiate parent activities, and subsidize health or nutrition services.

In summer 1994, American trainers visited each country to assist the Country Teams in training preschool directors, family coordinators, teachers, teacher assistants, and other educational staff. In September 1994, 252 classrooms in public preschools opened their doors to welcome children and parents into child-centered learning environments. Little did we anticipate how active these parents would become!

Reacting to the Needs of Civil Society: Growing Step by Step

From the outset, the active engagement of parents in the preschool programs shaped the project's future. The original program strategy planned for replication after the project ended. It was envisaged that preschools would take on new roles as training centers, linking themselves with neighboring in-service training institutions. In reality, expansion plans were made within the first year, in response to requests of directors, teachers, and parents represented by Country Teams at their first meeting in December 1994.

When the Country Teams next met in September 1995, they reviewed new

1996

New Step by Step Countries

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan

Program Development

Based on its success, OSI extends two-year program to a five-year development plan.

Parents demand SbS primary school follow-up for children leaving preschool. OSI agrees and the Primary Initiative is launched.

Infant-Toddler program is launched.

The Higher Education Initiative is also launched to ensure systemic impact.

Network Development

Regional and national meetings continue to provide a forum for networking among countries.

Program Expansion

19 countries active in network.

1,367 kindergarten and primary classrooms in operation.

1997

New Step by Step Countries

Haiti, Latvia, South Africa

Program Development

Best preschools and primary schools become training centers to provide opportunities for trainees to observe classrooms. In addition, decentralization of training increases accessibility and affordability.

OSI mandates that SbS programs should become independent NGOs.

Network Development

Initiative from SbS teams to explore forming an international professional network for ECD at a SbS Higher Education conference at Keszthely, Hungary.

Program Expansion

22 countries active in network.

2,718 kindergarten and primary classrooms in operation.

96 training centers open. Student teachers begin to fulfill their practicum requirements in SbS classrooms.

Table 1: Step by Step Country Development Model

Support for	Program	Phase	Academic Years					
			1	2	3	4	5	6
Schools <i>(At levels of local communities)</i>	Training	On-site training at schools	■	■	■	■	■	■
		Preschool <i>Grants to schools</i>	Demonstration Classrooms	■	■	■	■	■
	Expansion Classrooms		■	■	■	■	■	■
	Primary <i>Grants to schools</i>	Demonstration Classrooms	■	■	■	■	■	■
Expansion Classrooms		■	■	■	■	■	■	
Institutional Reform <i>(At level of National Institutions and Ministry)</i>	Teacher Training Institute Reform	Informal Links with Institutes	■	■	■	■	■	■
		Develop Model Training Classrooms	■	■	■	■	■	■
		Seminar for Institute Faculty	■	■	■	■	■	■
		Reform of Content & Methods	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Ministry Approval <i>Curriculum approved as official alternative</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	

■ Soros Network Funds

■ Self-Sustaining without OSI-NY Funds

Program Replicates with Own Resources

demands from parents who wanted the project extended into primary schools in order to ensure continuity for their children. Despite the initial strong objections from staff at OSI—who were wary of introducing reforms that might inadvertently diminish the notoriously strong student test scores in primary schools in the region—plans to begin an extensive initiative in primary schools were launched.

At this point the new name Step by Step was adopted to express the continuity of the program and its staged approach to educational reform. A primary methodology and accompanying training manual were developed. Staff with expertise in primary education were hired in each country and sent to the United States for two weeks of training and school visits. In September 1996, 179 first grade classrooms opened in primary schools located near the pilot preschools. In the ensuing years, the project provided training for teachers in classrooms through grade 4.

In 1996 the strategy for Step by Step was re-defined according to a five-year development plan (see **Table 1**).

As a result of embarking on new initiatives to meet needs expressed by parents and the educational community, Step by Step now encompasses a diverse array of areas (see **Table 2**). This includes intensive efforts to improve school success for Roma children in Central and Eastern Europe, to reform teacher training systems, to promote mainstreaming of children with disabilities in regular classrooms, and to diversify early childhood development programming.

The number of these initiatives is impressive but has become overwhelming. The modification of the original concept has stretched the program scope almost beyond capacity. Consequently, Step by Step Country Teams tend to focus on select initiatives in their countries.

A Strategic Shift: Focusing on the Third Sector (NGOs) in Early Childhood

A new problem emerged in 1997. It began to seem unwise to turn over a quality-focused initiative to a ministry for safekeeping in a region with strong centralized ministries, eco-

Table 2

ISSA Initiatives	
<p>Within the context of child-centered learning and family participation, ISSA supports a wide range of programs. When implemented together, these initiatives provide a comprehensive foundation for reform of education and care for children from birth through age 10. Programs can also be implemented individually.</p> 	<p>Early Childhood (birth to age 6)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent Education Programs • Early Childhood Development Community Centers • Preschool • Center-based Infant and Toddler programs
	<p>Primary School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grades 1–4 • Creating Democratic Schools (School Improvement) • Community Education • Transition to Middle School
	<p>Equal Access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education for Social Justice • Inclusive Education • Roma and Minority Education
	<p>Teacher Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courses for Teacher Training/Re-training Institutions • Student Practica • Training for Adult Trainers • Teacher Certification
	<p>Civic Participation in Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent Advocacy • Educational Non-Governmental Organizations
	<p>Professional Standards and Assessment Instruments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program and Teacher Standards • Trainer Standards • Preschool and Primary Observation and Assessment Instruments

conomic uncertainty, unstable governments, and a highly politicized education sector. There was a frequent turnover of ministry officials and school principals. Quality safeguards, in the form of strong independent professional and parent associations, NGOs, and educational foundations, were missing. To address this, in 1998 OSI began a process of “spinning off” the Step by Step Country Teams from within the National Soros Foundations. Sustainability now depended on the ability of the Country Teams to take on the challenge of establishing NGOs in countries with no history of permitting a strong third sector.

In 1998 OSI embarked on an inten-

sive project to train and support Country Teams as they made this remarkable transformation. Staff participated in seminars on new topics such as facilitative leadership, strategic planning, financial management, governance, public relations, and proposal writing. Each team was required to develop a three-year strategic plan for their new NGO, upon which future funding from OSI was based. Mentors were sent to each country to assist with this process. As a result, 27 of the 30 Step by Step Programs are now operated by independent early childhood organizations. These organizations form the bedrock of a growing third sector, which engages in

1998

New Step by Step Countries

Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Mongolia

Program Development

NGO management training is provided and SbS teams begin the process of registering as independent NGOs. OSI requires business plans before offering long-term support. Bosnia is first to be accepted.

USAID sponsors evaluations of SbS programs in four countries.

Network Development

Task force is established to work out details of the new association. International Step by Step Association (ISSA) is established in October 1998 at a Founding Assembly in Dubrovnik, Croatia.

Program Expansion

26 countries active in network.

7,656 kindergarten and primary classrooms in operation.

188 training centers in operation.

1999

New Step by Step Countries

Montenegro's and Kosovo's programs become independent of the Yugoslav project and the Yugoslav project is renamed Serbia

Program Development

SbS Programs become independent.

New Initiatives:

- Inclusion of children with special needs;
- Parent advocacy;
- Roma Special Schools Initiative.

Due to heavy demand, expansion is too much, too fast — concern about maintaining high quality emerges.

Network Development

ISSA is legally established and registered in the Netherlands in March 1999.

First ISSA Board establishes initial strategy and operating procedures.

ISSA Standards Task Force is established to ensure high quality of program.

First annual ISSA conference is held in Visegrad, Hungary, with a focus on family involvement.

Program Expansion

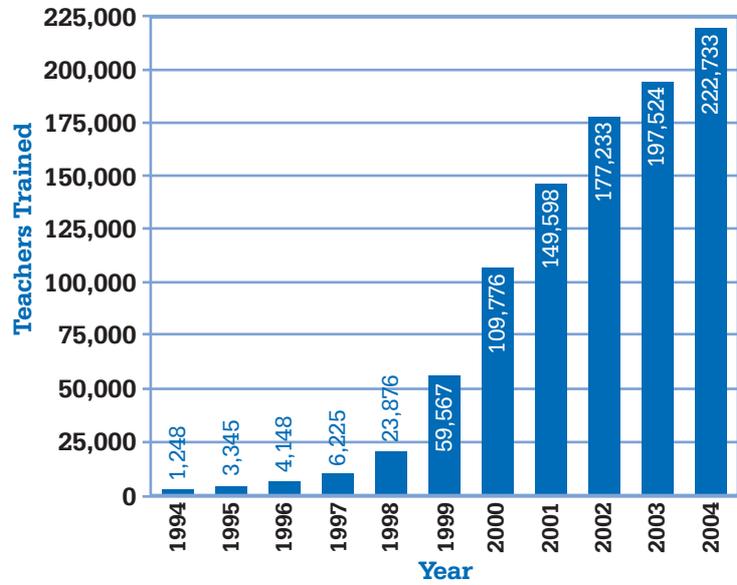
28 countries active in network.

23,902 kindergarten and primary classrooms in operation.

256 training centers in operation.

Teachers Trained

The capacity to reach and train an increasing number of teachers has been facilitated by partnerships with pedagogical universities in the Step by Step countries, and also by the establishment of 328 community-based training sites, with approval or accreditation from the local Ministry of Education.



advocacy and provides competitive, high quality educational services to communities, governments, and donor organizations.

Growing Together: the International Step by Step Association

The development of a strong personal and professional network helped nurture and sustain the program. The initial challenge to open the program in pilot preschools in September 1994 was immense. Annual meetings became a valuable forum for knowledge-sharing, where expert teams exchanged and analyzed experiences, personal stories, and advice.

In the summer of 1997 a group of higher education professors attending a Step by Step summer workshop in Keszthely, Hungary, requested the formalization of this growing informal network. Inspired by these meetings, they proposed the establishment of a regional association of professionals interested in child-centered methodologies. This call was taken up by the leaders of the Step by Step Country Programs and OSI in 1998. A permanent structure was required to support the new national NGOs and to provide a regional voice for professionals pro-

moting child-centered approaches. OSI supported the self-organization of the network.⁵ In October 1998 the International Step by Step Association (ISSA) was formally established at a Founding Assembly in Dubrovnik, Croatia. To increase opportunities for European Union co-operation, ISSA was registered in the Netherlands.

For the first three years ISSA operated from the OSI New York office, with Step by Step staff managing general coordination activities. Priority was placed on setting up basic administrative functions and on establishing the identity of the organization, but expectations from the members were very high, and proposals for diverse initiatives proliferated.

ISSA's national members believed that ISSA could attract international funding for national programs, replacing OSI as the main donor for the Step by Step Program. To achieve this, a full-time staff and independent office was required.

In 2001 ISSA's Board developed a strategic business plan for 2002-2005 to develop ISSA as an advocacy entity to promote child-centered, community-based early childhood programming internationally. A Network Division was set up to facilitate information

sharing (events, journals, websites, conferences) within the network and with international early childhood experts. A Program Division was established to develop existing Step by Step initiatives and to extend the program to new, interested countries. With the new plan in place, in 2002 ISSA hired full-time staff and set up an operational office in Budapest.

Today, ISSA is the primary networking organization for early childhood education in Central Eastern Europe. ISSA attracts members worldwide from over 42 countries.

Ensuring Quality Programming

One of ISSA's first activities was to launch, in 1999, the ISSA Early Childhood Quality Initiative, aimed at promoting ongoing professional development and recognizing excellence in early childhood teaching. A task force of experts from 11 countries developed

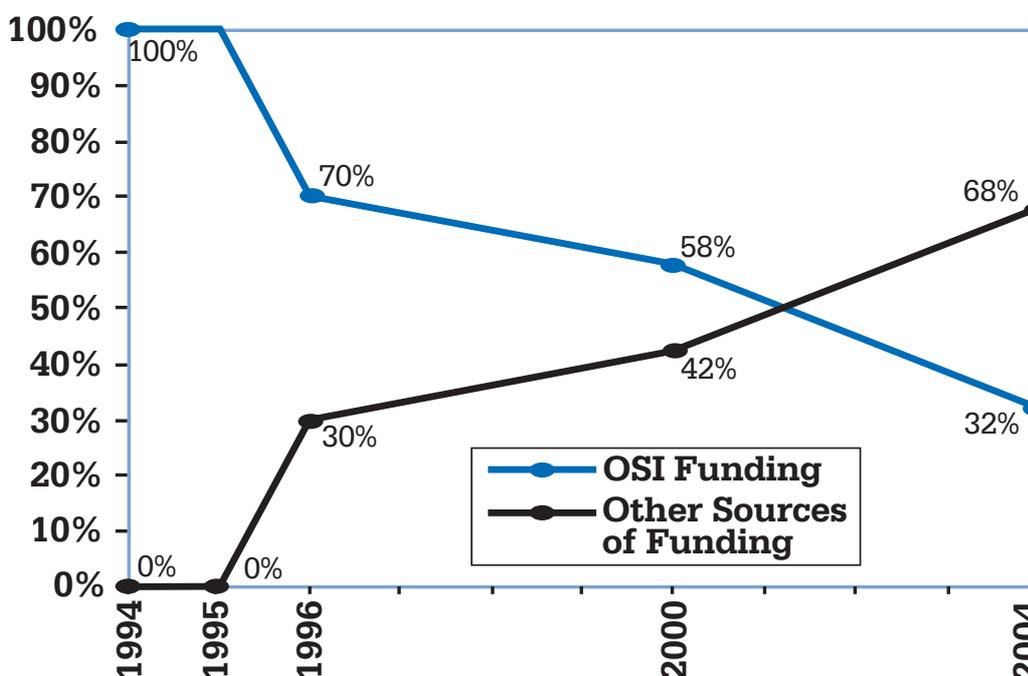
standards that could be used to ensure quality in the scale-up of country programs. The resulting publication, *Step by Step Program and Teacher Standards for Preschool and Primary Grades (2002)*, defined standards and indicators now used throughout ISSA's multi-national network. They provide a common framework for teachers to develop and measure professional growth with the support of trained mentors.

Development of the core standards and indicators was a challenging two-year process. Initial training modules for mentors and certifiers were scrapped after the first attempts failed to meet participants' needs. Training and manuals for certifiers, mentors, and teachers were rewritten and carefully trial-tested. Full-scale implementation began in earnest in the course of 2004.

We learned that establishing teaching standards is, in essence, political and that process is as impor-

Financial Support

As the programs became independent NGOs, they found multiple alternative sources of funding from local governments and other international organizations, which made it possible to maintain the robust growth and quality of the program.



2000

New Step by Step Countries

Program Development

Program in South Africa closes.

SbS students graduating to middle school— parents want services to continue in middle school.

Transition training for middle schools, and cooperation with OSI's Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking Program, designed for upper grades, begins.

Network Development

ISSA professional journal, *Educating Children for Democracy*, is published.

Second annual ISSA conference is held in Bled, Slovenia — "International Step by Step Association: Past, Present, Future."

Program Expansion

27 countries active in network.

14,596 kindergarten and primary classrooms in operation.

277 training centers in operation.

2001

New Step by Step Countries

Program Development

Roma Special Schools Initiative presents results of three-year project to Ministries of Education of six countries.

Initiative to launch web-based children's literature for SbS members, exchanging stories across borders.

Network Development

ISSA five-year strategic plan is presented to George Soros and accepted.

ISSA publishes Step by Step Program and Teacher Standards to provide a framework for program quality.

Third annual ISSA conference is held in Riga, Latvia — "Educating Children for Democracy: Our Future, Our Challenge."

New countries joining are assisted by other network countries. For example, Albania and Slovenia mentor Kosovo, Ukraine mentors Azerbaijan, and Bulgaria mentors Georgia.

Program Expansion

27 countries active in network.

16,500 kindergarten and primary classrooms in operation.

322 training centers in operation.



Step by Step Country Directors and U.S. Technical Assistance Team, Budapest, June 2002

tant as outcome. ISSA's standards, developed by experts from countries transitioning to open societies, place great emphasis on teaching that supports the new freedoms and responsibilities. Standards emphasize children's independence, initiative, and creativity; teacher facilitation; and parent participation. When the initial implementation demonstrated a shortcoming in measuring teacher performance in addressing issues of diversity in the classroom, a new standard was added requiring teachers to seek opportunities to open the minds and hearts of students to the cultures in their community.

There was a debate over how much flexibility to allow countries in adapting the standards instrument to national contexts. A compromise solution allowed countries to add contextual examples without changing key indicators.

Working Together: Our Partners

When the Step by Step Program was launched in 1994, few organizations were active in early childhood in Central and Eastern

Europe. OSI and Georgetown University staff who visited the region after the political changes in the early 1990's, were among the first foreigners to meet with preschool experts at Ministries of Education. Ministries, local governments, communities, parents, and children formed the primary partnerships in implementing the national programs. By 1996 they provided 30 percent of in-country funding. In these early days, it was critical that staff were able to count on multiyear funding commitments from the OSI, allowing national programs to focus on quality, rather than fundraising.

The establishment of national NGO early childhood organizations and ISSA reflected a new partnership strategy. Step by Step teams received training in how to approach partners and develop joint projects and proposals. Programs began to seek co-funding from national and international partners. Initially, programs succeeded in attracting modest funding, but large-scale partnerships with the World Bank, USAID, UNICEF, European Union PHARE and TACIS Programs soon followed. By 2002 partner organizations provided over 50 percent of the financial support for the Step by Step

Program, rising to almost 70 percent by 2003.

Partnership has inevitably influenced programming. Unfortunately, most of the major donors in the region have shown strong preference for funding education programs at the primary level and up. This makes co-funding for early childhood initiatives more difficult to secure. Advocacy efforts are needed to reverse this alarming trend. Secondly, while many of the largest partnership projects are national (single country), there has been a recent increase in large-scale regional or multi-country projects in the Step by Step network. Partly, this has developed as a result of countries becoming eligible to receive EU funding, as many EU partnership programs encourage multi-country initiatives. More recently UNICEF, the World Bank, and USAID have shown interest in regional initiatives. In this context, the strength of the ISSA network has been an asset.

Evaluating Quality and Assessing Impact

What is the real impact of the Step by Step Program? Like many large-scale programs implemented under pressure, Step by Step was not initially engaged deeply in evaluation. An early plan to collect data for a longitudinal study was dropped in the first year as Country Teams struggled under intense deadlines.

When Step by Step was reconceived as a five+ year initiative in 1998, the urgent need for evaluation re-emerged. With the support of USAID, the Step by Step Project embarked on a four-country independent evaluation, which demonstrated the impact of the program on children's democratic behaviors, ideas and values. This included: making choices, taking initiatives, valuing individual expression, and contributing as members of a

learning community. It provided the first evidence that Step by Step seems to provide greater support to children who enter with less-developed academic skills, illustrating that child-centered approaches enable teachers to respond to individual needs.

Research has also been used to advocate for children's rights. The Roma Special Schools Project challenged the placement of the inordinate number of Roma children assigned to remedial classrooms or "special schools" for the mentally handicapped in four countries. The project placed Roma teaching assistants in the classrooms who became an important bridge to the Roma community, and also provided intensive teacher training on anti-bias education, child-centered practices, and second language learning. The results of this pilot project were closely monitored by independent evaluators. After three years, the data demonstrated that 62 percent of the children deemed intellectually-challenged reached grade-level expectations. These results were presented to the Ministries of Education as a challenge to change the status quo of educating Roma children.

Evaluation has ensured the sustainability of Step by Step. External evaluations have been critical to the acceptance of Step by Step methods by education ministries. Within the OSI, evaluation has been used to defend funding for the program. In 2000, OSI commissioned a four-country study on NGO sustainability. The independent evaluators concluded that the new Step by Step NGOs have the capacity to continue all program activities in the future and are well-placed for long-term sustainability, despite the challenges posed by economic and political uncertainties.

2002

New Step by Step Countries

Program Development

New Initiatives:

- Reaching children with no access to preschool.
- School Improvement.
- Partnership with Council for Exceptional Children formalized.

Network Development

ISSA establishes office and staff in Budapest.

ISSA hires Executive Director who sets up office in Budapest.

Fourth annual ISSA conference is held in Vilnius, Lithuania — "Partnership with Families and Communities: Together is Better."

International Advisory Board established; meets in Prague.

Program Expansion

27 countries active in network.

20,849 kindergarten and primary classrooms in operation.

325 training centers in operation.

2003

New Step by Step Countries

Uzbekistan, Tajikistan

Program Development

USAID-funded PEAKS project begins in Central Asia.

ISSA's Reading Corner publishes 22 children's books in all languages of SbS network.

Network Development

First ISSA Teacher Certificates awarded for teachers who have passed ISSA Standards.

Fifth annual ISSA conference is held in Prague, Czech Republic — "Quality and Equality in Early Childhood Education."

Kyrgyzstan mentors Tajikistan and Kazakhstan mentors Uzbekistan.

Program Expansion

29 countries active in network.

22,648 kindergarten and primary classrooms in operation.

316 training centers in operation.

OSI and ISSA recently initiated a large-scale, two-year project to document and analyze the experiences of the past decade.

Building on the tenth anniversary celebrations in

2004, the collective Case Study Project will contribute the knowledge gained through the Step by Step Program to the early childhood development field, representing its diverse, complex, and rich experience. Through the project, professionals in project countries are provided with an opportunity to develop and practice skills in hitherto unfamiliar case study approaches. This qualitative research method complements the program's developmental philosophy, emphasizing the uniqueness of every individual, classroom, school, community, and country. The Case Study Project provides country case study teams with opportunities for multiple learning experiences and ongoing mentoring. It is expected that each of the 30 participating countries will contribute a case study to the collection.

The outcome on children is, perhaps, hardest to measure. National studies consistently show children in Step by Step reaching or exceeding national average test scores in academic subjects. Critically, several studies have shown that the programs promote social and emotional development. Children in Step by Step score higher on tests measuring cooperation, leadership, self-esteem, problem solving, and perseverance. Step by Step is gathering these studies to undertake a meta-analysis of children's outcomes and answer the most basic question: has the program been successful at improving the lives of young children and families in the region?



Before (above) and after (below) implementation of the Step by Step Program



The Next Ten Years

Step by Step has grown exponentially into an extended initiative providing continuity and comprehensive educational approaches for children up to the age of ten. Placing emphasis on the development of human capacity, we have learned that people are everything. Step by Step has held over 48 international or regional training events in Central and Eastern Europe, 10 training courses in the United States, and 5 international conferences. This process of knowledge transfer has been repeated

within each country, through training, mentoring, development, and distribution of hundreds of professional resources. The new emphasis on teacher standards has sharpened human capacity growth. Participants live the motto of “life-long learning,” seeking answers to program challenges through ongoing professional development.

ISSA's vision of “an open society where the entire community helps each child to reach his or her full potential” is achievable only if Step by Step forms new partnerships to advocate for universal services for young children. In Central and Eastern Europe, where Roma children lack academic and social preparation for primary school, attempts are being made to ensure two full years of preschool for each child. In countries to the east and south where fewer than 20 percent of children attend preschool, new partnerships are needed to provide communities with the authority and opportunity to reallocate funding for early childhood and increase access to a greater variety of services such as parent education, home-based early learning, and community centers. As ISSA engages in early childhood initiatives in new countries and regions, the ability to offer more flexible (non-center-based) programming and adaptations for cultural contexts is essential.

Changing attitudes takes time, effort, support, and commitment. Securing this commitment from election-minded politicians seeking quick results is, perhaps, the most daunting task for child educators, caregivers, and advocates. For Step by Step, the future will depend on its ability to mobilize support for early childhood internationally, using the extensive social capital that the program has acquired in national NGOs, and col-

lectively through ISSA. To do this effectively, ISSA and its members need to gain more capacity in research, evaluation, and advocacy. We will vocalize the collective power of our international network, approaching future challenges “step by step” with the enthusiasm and effort that has been the continuing strength of the program.

* The author gratefully acknowledges the expert assistance of Rachel Holmes in revising and condensing this article from a longer manuscript.

¹ The Open Society Institute is a private, grant-making foundation based in New York City, created in 1993 by George Soros to support his foundations in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. These foundations were established, starting in 1984, to help former communist countries in their transition to democracy.

² Throughout this article we refer to Step by Step Country Teams. To implement Step by Step, each participating country designates a Country Team, comprised of a Country Director, several Master Teacher Trainers, and support staff.

³Albania, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Ukraine, Yugoslavia

⁴Enterprise preschools formed a significant percentage of preschools in the countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

⁵An independent governance structure placed the country program staff with the majority vote on the new Board of Directors.

2004

New Step by Step Countries

Argentina

Program Development

Case Study Project: A 10 year retrospective.

Network Development

We Celebrate 10 unbelievable years together!!!!

Haiti provides training in Argentina, and SbS arrives on a new continent!

Sixth annual ISSA conference is held in Budapest, Hungary — “Stepping into the Future: 10th Anniversary of the SbS Program.”

Program Expansion

30 countries active in network.

24,172 kindergarten and primary classrooms in operation.

328 training centers in operation.



Albania

Hap pas Hapi Center

The mission of the Hap pas Hapi Center (HPH Center) is to model and disseminate democratic principles in Albanian Early Childhood Education while paying special attention to social and minority ethnic group settings. The HPH Center aims to be an agent of change to integrate Albanian schools into the European system of education and to promote democratic changes to benefit children and families.

The main activities of the HPH Center include:

- Consultation, training, and technical assistance on early childhood development for caregivers, teachers, parents, faculty members, and students.
- Ongoing professional development for Step by Step teachers and specialists to increase the quality of care and education offered by the program.
- Publication of child-centered literature for professionals at the creche, preschool, primary, and higher education levels to promote professional information sharing.
- Evaluation and accreditation for Step by Step and other child-centered kindergartens and primary schools.

Albanian professionals began implementing the Step by Step Program in Albania in 1994. Currently the Step by Step network includes 108 preschool and 120 primary school classrooms, reaching children and their families in nine districts. Teachers receive training in child-centered methods at seven model preschool training sites and four teacher preparation faculties. The Ministry of Education and Science has approved the program as an alternative methodology for preschool and as an experimental methodology for primary school. The HPH Center is improving teaching methods, school management and administration, student and teacher evaluation, and community attitudes towards preschool and school for young children in Albania.

Partners:

- *Ministry of Education and Science*
- *Local Education Authorities*
- *Institute of Pedagogical Studies and Teacher Preparation Universities*
- *UNICEF Albania*
- *Plan International*
- *Catholic Relief Services*
- *Albanian Reading Association*
- *Save the Children Albania*



Oendra Hap pas Hapi — Step by Step Center

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“No way back!” The story of a Step by Step Primary School Teacher

She is one of those wonderful teachers we all wish could teach our children. She came to Tirana and started work in the Emin Duraku School a year after the project began. She was enthusiastic about the Step by Step methodology and insisted on being involved in the Step by Step training for primary school.

Since then, she has worked with the Step by Step methodology. “It was so hard in the beginning; I did not think I could make it. I was new to the school, the parents didn’t know me, the methodology was new, and I was new to the methodology—it was almost too much to bear.” She did not give up. She continued to struggle and to “chew” the methodology bit by bit.

“I became known as a very good teacher, especially due to the parents of the children. I received an offer from a private school with a salary triple to the one I was making. I was ecstatic! I was talking to the director of the new school about changes I was proposing to make to the teaching style of the classroom. He



told me to take it easy—he just wanted a good teacher, teaching the good old way. I started working in the school but I just could not change back to the old way. I knew that Step by Step was so much better! I was feeling miserable! I thought it through, discussed it with my husband and decided to go back to Step by Step. The director was very supportive and made it possible for me to go back to my old school.”

The story of this teacher is not an isolated episode. Many other teachers have said they could not teach using the old style when they changed jobs. Many private schools have understood this as well—they keep stealing our wonderful, committed Step by Step teachers. The investment that Step by Step has made to Albanian public education is being noticed by the private sector. It is the responsibility of the State to keep the motivated teachers in the public system, and it is the responsibility of the Step by Step Center to keep lobbying to protect its investment.

— Gerda Sula, Country Director, Step by Step, Albania



Argentina

Fundacion Leer

Fundacion Leer is a non-governmental organization established in March 1997. Its mission is to have a lasting and positive impact on the lives of our country's children, motivating reading and promoting literacy, so they can realize their full potential and integrate into society. Its focus is the creation of a reading habit—a fundamental aspect of the educational process of children and youth.

To start, Fundacion Leer signed a licensing agreement with US-based Reading Is Fundamental Inc. (RIF) to carry out its program. Argentina is the first Spanish-speaking nation to have a license from RIF and the second outside the United States.

It has since incorporated other programs developed in-house that support its mission. In all, Fundacion Leer's programs reach children ages birth to 18, teachers, parents, and community members through volunteering. Since its inception in 1997, Fundacion Leer has grown from 1,550 children, 4,800 books, and 30 teachers to 57,400 children, 180,000 books, and 1,045 teachers who participate in the program each year from across the country.

Fundacion Leer is the first not-for-profit organization to be authorized to implement the Step by Step Program outside of the Soros Network Foundation. The International Step by Step Association (ISSA) provides training and Step by Step methodologies to Fundacion Leer. In Argentina, the Step by Step program is carried out in three locations in Buenos Aires province and one in Misiones province. All participating schools (four kindergarten schools and four primary schools) educate children from very low income homes, which usually suffer housing problems, unemployment and/or analfabetism. Schools also function with little or no government support and, for the most part, have rundown buildings and scarce resources to operate.

This led to Fundacion Leer's search for funding to provide economic support to implement the Step by Step Program and volunteers. It was thanks to private corporate support that the Step by Step Program could be launched in Argentina. In Argentina, the Step by Step Program is being carried out in 12 kindergarten classrooms and 19 primary school classrooms (9 first grades and 10 second grades), serving a total of 822 children. Twenty-nine teachers and 13 principals participate in the program.



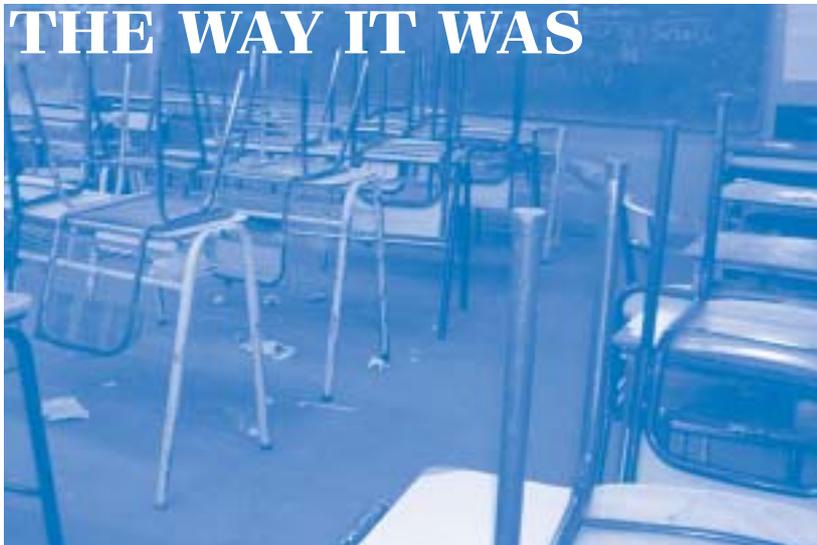
Fundacion Leer

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THE WAY IT WAS



THE WAY IT IS NOW

“Thanks to the implementation of the program, teachers have opened themselves to other pedagogical strategies—creative centers, cooperative work, and materials within the reach of all the children.”

– *Marcela Chapado, Headmistress, School No 2*

“One of the most important changes consists in the fact that we can look after each child individually, paying attention to their abilities. There are no more remarks about a child unable to do a thing. There is always an achievement.”

– *Silvia Battistin, Librarian, School No 2*

“The results have been really positive—children are more motivated; they collaborate with each other. They are more sociable, and the whole group can develop cooperative learning.”

– *Mercedes Brizuela, Teacher, School No 2, Tortuguitas*

“Lots of parents helped to redecorate the classrooms and participate in the program. Local shops donated materials, seamstresses helped sew the curtains, mothers helped in the kitchen, and fathers have shared special recipes.”

– *Miriam Bennesch, Coordinator of Montecarlo, Misiones*

“I added the collaboration of parents to the writing and reading workshops. Children created different books with the aid of the parents.”

– *Mercedes Brizuela, Teacher, School No 2, Tortuguitas*

“I am very pleased with the way the teacher develops the Step by Step program and with the way my little girl adopts it. She loves to come to the kindergarten because she knows that she is going to learn something new and also because she knows that I am going to collaborate in the classroom, once in a while.”

– *Marcela, Paz's mother, Kindergarten No 903, Tortuguitas*

“What I like most is work in the art center, because I can draw, paint, and play with my friends”.

– *Rocío Quiroga, Kindergarten, Juana Manso, Avellaneda*

“I love working in teams—it's fun. I like dramatizations and mothers who read stories and help us in workshops. I would like it if my father, Favio, came to sing.”

– *Catalina Spingola, 1st grade, EGB 2, Tortuguitas*





Armenia

Step by Step Benevolent Foundation

The Step by Step Program was initiated in Armenia in 1998 under the sponsorship of the Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation—Armenia. Because of economic difficulties in the country, many kindergartens were on the verge of closure, and very little attention was paid to primary education. In that context, the Step by Step Program was introduced to support early childhood education and promote educational reforms in the country. From an initial pilot group of ten classrooms in five kindergartens located in three major cities, the program has expanded to about 200 kindergartens and 170 primary schools throughout Armenia.

The Step by Step Benevolent Foundation (SBSBF) was founded in 2000 to continue promoting child-centered early childhood education through teacher training, methodological support, and school improvement. The program works with teachers and professionals at three levels: preschool, primary school, and higher education. Training sites have been established in six kindergartens and five primary schools in five major cities: Yerevan, Vanadzor, Noyemberyan, Eghegnadzor and Martouni. Professionals at these sites conduct in-service training for preschool and primary school teachers, support student practicum for pedagogical universities and teacher training institutes, and ensure continuity of the program by interesting new sites in working with the child-centered methodology.

The Ministry of Education has officially recognized the Step by Step Program, and included it in the Education Development State Program for 2001-2005.

With the assistance of mentors from the United States, as well as from the Step by Step Program in Moldova, the SBSBF is developing a certification plan for teachers to ensure high quality child-centered education in kindergartens and schools of Armenia. The certification plan is based on the standards developed by ISSA.

Partners:

SBSBF collaborates with other NGOs, local educational authorities, and international organizations to promote areas of common interest in education. These collaborations focus on home-based education and parenting with *UNICEF*; and inclusive education for children with disabilities with *World Vision*. SBSBF also implements the Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT) Program, which logically complements the Step by Step Program in middle and high school. Schools involved in the Step by Step Program also participate in RWCT training. SBSBF publishes the RWCT-Armenia newsletter, including articles from the *Thinking Classroom* journal.



Step by Step Benevolent Foundation

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Step by Step Benevolent Foundation

ARMENIA

The Step by Step Program promotes democratic values through the introduction of child-centered teaching practices across Armenia—in kindergartens, primary schools, and higher education institutions.

Students in the classrooms develop skills of productive thinking; they discuss serious questions and formulate creative ideas.



Our priority is to help families ensure that their children reach school-age not only healthy and well-nourished, but also intellectually curious, socially confident, and equipped with a solid foundation for life-long learning.



The aim of the program is the development of skills through active learning. Gaining knowledge through practice is something that our schools lack.

Learning is fun in our classrooms. We enjoy measuring our smiles and acting as the heroes of different stories.



We strongly believe that effective learning happens through training, networking, sharing of ideas, and diverse perspectives.



Azerbaijan

Open Society Institute— Assistance Foundation Azerbaijan

The Step by Step Program began operating in 1998 as one of the regional projects financed by the Open Society Institute New York together with the National Foundation Open Society Institute—Assistance Foundation Azerbaijan. The Open Society Institute (OSI) is a key organization in promoting educational reform in Azerbaijan. Step by Step is one of the most important programs at OSI, especially because its focus on preschool education reform is not covered by other organizations.

The Step by Step Program has grown from 9 kindergartens in 5 towns to 151 classrooms in 53 kindergartens and 139 classrooms in 56 primary schools. All national minorities in Azerbaijan have been involved in the implementation of the Step by Step Program. A project on inclusive education was started in 2004.

In addition, the Step by Step Program collaborates with 7 universities to provide pre-service and in-service training of teachers throughout Azerbaijan and sponsors an internship program in cooperation with the Pedagogical Institute. The Step by Step Program has established 11 Training Centers, which provide training for teachers, parents, and community leaders, as well as for those already working in the Step by Step Program.

The program enjoys strong approval from the Ministry of Education and each of the universities within the country. Evaluation of the program has documented substantial progress of children in all domains

and has increased interest in reform of educational curriculum at all levels. Step by Step Azerbaijan also encourages the development of children's books for publication on the ISSA website and invites contributions to the ISSA journal.

Partners:

- *SOS Kinderdorf*
- *Schools*
- *Preschools*
- *Universities*
- *Teacher Re-Training Institutes*
- *Ministry of Education*
- *UNICEF*
- *UNESCO*
- *EXXON MOBIL*
- *British Petroleum*
- *Children's Aid Direct*
- *United Aid for Azerbaijan*
- *United Nations Women's Guild*
- *United Methodist Committee on Relief*
- *World Vision*
- *International Organization for Migration*



Open Society Institute—Assistance Foundation Azerbaijan Step by Step Program

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Before 1998

- The role of early child development was not valued in society. There were mass closures of kindergartens.
- Preschool services were mainly for urban children.
- “Education” happened with very limited participation of families.
- Traditional early childhood programs were unable to meet the needs of all children. The current system was not doing an adequate job of preparing pupils to work and participate in civil society and family life.

But there were also conditions conducive to the introduction of the Step by Step Program:

- There was a readiness on the part of the Ministry of Education to change the education system.
- There was a lack of developmentally appropriate teaching materials, textbooks and children’s books, and a lack of awareness about educational innovations.
- Step by Step Program priorities focused on involvement of rural teachers and communities, national minorities, and teachers’ personal motivation and readiness to change.



“The lessons are beautiful and very attractive. The children learn without competing. Regardless of their strengths and weaknesses, all children are motivated to work and learn together.”

— *Step by Step teacher*

NOW



- The Step by Step Program has become an integral part of the education reform process in Azerbaijan. The Step by Step preschool program was approved as a new pedagogical technology, and the Step by Step primary program was approved as an experimental pedagogical technology. Expansion of the Step by Step Program has been recommended to all local education authorities.
- The Step by Step Program has

been included in the curriculum for pre-service teacher preparation and in-service teacher training. A countrywide network of Higher Education Resource Centers has been established.

- Step by Step preschool and primary school sites have been approved as schools for student teaching practice. A countrywide network of Step by Step training centers has been established and accredited by the Ministry of Education.
- New children’s writers have become known as a result of the publishing project.



“The school community was very excited about the good results and achievements.”

— *Step by Step teacher*



Where We Are Going

- Expand a countrywide network of Step by Step training centers. Develop their organizational capacity to become a highly professional alternative venue for in-service teacher training.
- Develop new training modules and national teaching materials.
- Develop a professional agency to deliver educational and consulting services to plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate educational projects.

- Maintain program quality through the international certification of Step by Step teachers.
- Develop NGO sustainability by becoming a publishing house for children’s literature and methodological books.
- Participate in creating and piloting a national program on inclusive education for children with disabilities.
- Develop a multicultural education curriculum through the incorporation of issues on the culture and history of minorities settled in Azerbaijan.





Belarus

Belarusian Parents and Teachers League

Belarusian Parents and Teachers League (BPTL) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization (NGO) that was formed in 1998 to promote a civil society in Belarus. Growing out of the Step by Step Program operated by the Belarusian Soros Foundation, BPTL aims to strengthen civic grassroots activities for parents and other concerned citizens. This work is accomplished by creating democratic schools that encourage active parent and community collaboration and promote individualized, child-centered practices. The mission of the BPTL is to affect systemic change in educational institutions and other spheres of civil society to enable citizens to think creatively and analyze their political, social, and cultural environment effectively.

BPTL engages in three broad activities:

- *Educational Programs:* 22,500 teachers of children from birth through 12 years old have been trained in the Step by Step methodologies; 1,300 children with special needs are served in 194 inclusive classrooms across Belarus; 28 teachers and teaching assistants working with Roma children have been trained; and 86 Roma children are receiving a child-centered curriculum.
- *Civil Society Programs:* 965 parents have participated in a variety of workshops designed to build skills in working collaboratively with teachers and school administrators; 415 other community residents from 20 cities/communities have attended workshops on advocacy; and 3,475 students from 11 universities/colleges have participated in volunteer community projects, including serving as teaching assistants in Step by Step classrooms.
- *Publishing Programs:* 6 methodologies and training manuals have been translated into Belarusian for parents, teachers, and administrators; a newsletter has also been developed and distributed as a way to exchange information among the 1,595 active, full-time members of the BPTL.



Belarusian Parents and Teachers League Step by Step

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The First Step by Step Pupils in Belarus

Twenty-eight friendly, cheerful, tireless 9th graders who started in Step by Step in September 1995 share their purposefulness, self-assurance, and perceptions of the world.

What I remember ...

“This program teaches children to communicate. Now I can talk to anyone and not feel ill at ease.”

— Viktor Papko

“I have learned to make choices and think critically.”

— Sasha Lapitsky

“We became more easy-going, learned to work in groups, and what is more important stopped being afraid to say aloud our thoughts.”

— Sergey Pengrin



“Children learn to respect themselves, friends, parents, and teachers. They learn to make thoughtful choices for careers, materials, partners, and activities.”

— Inessa Maksimchik, Mother and Journalist

“Step by Step is a philosophy of life for every teacher who cares about the future of our children. It makes us think about the destiny of education facing the 21st century. That is

why I have faith in my school and entrusted my grandson to it.”

— Mikhail Kolesnikov, School Director and Deputy Member of the City Administration

How I can contribute to society's development...

“Every person should make a feasible contribution in the life of his own society. And one should not wait to be a grown-up.”

— Maksim Yurkovets

“Possibly I would restore national culture monuments, create organizations in which youth could develop themselves instead of staying at home or idling their time on the benches in doorways.”

— Lilja Kozlova



“Parents accepted Step by Step positively and became real

partners with our teachers in forming this generation. The life of kindergarten and primary school changed from an institution full of instructions and rules to a school filled with joyful children.

— Raisa Eromenok, Kindergarten Principal and Honored Teacher

How I would change the current educational system ...

“I would like to study our local Belarus language and literature on a larger scale.... I would make one state (Belarus) language.”

— Varja Garbusevich

“The bigger we are, the more we understand the reality around us.”

— Katya Radevich



From the teachers...

“Most important was the expression on the faces of our pupils – love to their classmates, pride for the Step by Step Program, and a strong desire to make life better. We believe they will secure this.... Let their thoughts be the prologue to a long history of the Step by Step Program in our country.”

— Teachers: Elena Radevich and Elena Lizkevich





Bosnia & Herzegovina

Center for Educational Initiatives Step by Step

The Center for Educational Initiatives Step by Step (CEI) is a unique association of parents, teachers, and others from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina, dedicated to promoting educational initiatives based on principles of democratic civil society. Professional staff of CEI develop and deliver training programs for higher education faculty, teachers, school directors, and parents. CEI has established 13 training centers across Bosnia and Herzegovina, which provide a network for rapid information exchange and coordination of activities.

Since 1996 CEI has implemented the Step by Step Program—the only early childhood program to operate continuously in Bosnia in the post-war period. The program has helped rebuild the early childhood education system, which was severely damaged during the war, providing comprehensive training and, initially, rebuilding physical infrastructure in cooperation with other donors. Currently operating in 1,339 classrooms, the Step by Step Program is remarkable for its ability to cooperate with local governments in all 10 cantons of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brcko District, and Republika Srpska. Experts from universities and ministries throughout the country have agreed on basic standards for early childhood education, an important step toward reforming curricula and creating a unified policy on the federal level.

CEI's recent initiatives include:

Training for primary teachers in every school across Bosnia and Herzegovina in cooperation with UNICEF and the development of a sustainable system of child-friendly training and school improvement consulting, based on model centers located in each canton.

Extension of Step by Step to serve Roma children in seven primary schools in cooperation with the Open Society Fund of Bosnia and Herzegovina, ministries of education, and local communities.

Implementation of the Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking project, a teacher training program in collaboration with the International Reading Association.

Partners:

- *Open Society Fund Bosnia-Herzegovina*
- *UNICEF Bosnia and Herzegovina*
- *13 Ministries of Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina*
- *OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina*
- *SOS Kinderdorf*

Center for Educational Initiatives Step by Step

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Hurray, it is Monday!!! As soon as I enter the classroom I put the post-it with the message "MY GRANDMA CAUGHT A CROCODILE" on the Daily Happening column of our Morning Meeting Billboard. I can't wait to tell the entire story to my classmates. As we sat in the circle, teacher asked me what happened... Simply, my Grandma shot a crocodile with a gun that had a needle, put the crocodile on her shoulder and took it to the factory where they made shoes and a purse for her. In fact, my grandma lives in Germany, where I was born, and she hunts crocodiles in Australia where she travels on her bike.



I finish the story. Everyone looks strangely at me. Yes, I know! They admire me! Hey, who else has a grandma that can catch a crocodile? Even my teacher was confused a bit, but she hugged me and said that she is happy to have a child whose imagination can take away all rainy clouds and make our days so beautiful.



I did not really understand what she meant, but nobody laughed at me this time. I was really careful not to use German words and phrases, and I didn't make even one mistake. Sometimes I get in trouble because they don't understand me. Once, I asked English teacher did she have a man, and I just wanted to find out if she was married. For hours I tried convincing my best friend to read "Pipi Langestrumpfe", instead of "Pippi Longstocking", and he swore that Mond Negro does not exist.... Hey, it does not exist, and I spend whole summer holidays there.



I collect different things: beads, pins, small stamps and dead flies that I hide all over the classroom. My favorite place to hide all those things is in my teacher's handbag. It seems that she never cleans it up, because I always find everything I hid in it yesterday.



I enjoy walking in and around the school and peeking in other classrooms and offices. I am curious; everything interests me. I love my class, my friends, teacher, even the principal who does not scold when he sees me in the hall during the classes. It seems that he understands me.



Tomorrow is Tuesday, and the weather forecast said it will rain again. This autumn does not like children too much. We are so wistful and listlessly hang about the classroom or in the yard. But I've got a cure! I think that my father will take a big balloon to the moon tonight. I can't wait to tell the story to my friends. Even if I make some mistakes, it won't be a big deal. I am sure that I will cheer them up. In fact, I think I understand what my teacher wanted to say this morning, after my story.

My name is Benjo. I am seven.



Bulgaria

Step By Step Program Foundation/Bulgaria

The Step by Step Program Foundation/Bulgaria is a non-governmental organization working in Bulgarian education since 1994. Step by Step–Bulgaria aims to advance quality education for the 21st century and promote implementation of democratic principles in education through in-service and pre-service teacher training programs, dissemination of interactive teaching methods, and research and evaluation of educational projects.

The Step by Step network currently includes 78 kindergartens, 103 primary schools, 3 special needs schools, and 5 pedagogical institutions.

Initiatives underway include:

- Infant and Toddler Groups Project
- Preschool Project
- Primary School Project
- Higher Education Project
- Children with Special Educational Needs Project
- Boards of School Trustees Project
- Municipality - Model Site Project
- Special Schools Project

The Foundation has also developed a project for qualification with the following training modules:

- 1) *For principals*–Philosophy and main components of the Step by Step Program, team work, assessing the quality of the school work, self-support, family involvement;
- 2) *For teachers*–Philosophy and main components of the Step by Step Program, interactive teaching methods, thematic teaching, new educational technologies, organizing a child-centered school environment, individualization, observing and assessing children’s development, anti-bias, integrating children with special educational needs, and minority children;
- 3) *For parents*–Philosophy and the main components of the Step by Step Program, communication, parent involvement, creating effective boards of school trustees, and advocacy.

Since we began our work, 1,338 teachers, administrators and faculty have participated in the training. Parents and experts from the regional inspectorates of the Ministry of Education have also been trained.

Partners:

The Step by Step Program works in collaboration with the *Ministry of Education and Science, Open Society Foundation–Sofia, Open Society Institute–New York, Bulgarian National Committee for UNICEF, PHARE Program, Socrates National Agency, and Catholic Relief Services.*



Step by Step Program Foundation/Bulgaria

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Step By Step Program Foundation/Bulgaria

Children:

“I like it. We decide what we will write on the posters. We have a notice board on which we mark what we have to do during the day.”

— Pavel Damianov, Grade I-b

“We sit in a circle; we share interesting stories and play different games with our teacher. We begin with the program and after that unnoticeably we continue with the lessons.”

— Denitsa Pencheva, Grade I-a

Parents:

“We travel from another district so that our daughter can attend Zornitsa Kindergarten. We are very impressed with the creative teaching methods and the individual care given each child. We feel the children grow up as individuals and know what they want, what they can do, and how to achieve it. There are positive relationships between the children. When we come to pick up our daughter, she wants to stay a few minutes more.”

— Petra and Plamen, Ina’s parents

Teachers:

“We are enthusiastic about the Step by Step Program. The most pleasant and exciting part for the children is the morning meeting. They share things that interest them; they learn to listen carefully, to tell stories, and to be compassionate.”

— Blaga Dimitrova and Ludmila Terzieva

Mayor of Mladost Region:

“I would like to send congratulations and best wishes. Let kindness and humanity accompany all your actions devoted to children so that we can introduce, keep, and confirm the values of humanism and democracy in our society.”





Croatia

Parents Association Step by Step and Open Academy Step by Step

The Parents Association Step by Step (PA) was founded in Zagreb in September 1997. The mission of PA Step by Step is to support the development of democratic relations in the society by protecting, respecting, and advocating for the rights and interests of children and families. PA Step by Step also founded the Open Academy Step by Step to continue this mission.

PA Step by Step supports the active participation of parents in the educational process and promotes communication between children and adults and between parents and teachers on such issues as multiculturalism, peace, ecology, disease, drug prevention, and other concerns, in order to improve the quality of life for children and families. PA Step by Step increases public awareness and advocates for the rights and interests of children, as well as providing counseling to parents on their rights and interests.

The basic activity of the Open Academy Step by Step is training adults—teachers, other professionals, and parents—to implement child-centered educational practices in nurseries, kindergartens, and elementary schools. PA Step by Step developed the first in-service training center in Croatia based on a humanistic developmental approach. The model “from practice, for practice, to practice” is used to transmit knowledge of educational practices based on the practical experiences of teachers. The mentors of training workshops are educators who apply the Step by Step model in their own classrooms. Such professionals enhance the training experience by speaking about their own everyday practice.

The Open Academy Step by Step promotes child-centered education methods by publishing translations of Step by Step methodologies, as well as original books written by Croatian authors. In addition, two magazines, *Child, Kindergarten, Family* and *Child, School, Family*, provide an opportunity for educators and families to exchange their experiences in implementing the Step by Step approach.

The Step by Step Program has grown since its inception in Croatia in 1994. Currently, there are 265 primary and 258 preschool Step by Step classrooms. More than 3,000 teachers have received training and 400 more teachers are trained annually. Thirty-four faculty members provide training in child-centered methods in 11 training centers.

In 2000 the Ministry of Education recognized the Step by Step Program as an official alternative method known as the model “Step by Step.”



Open Academy Step by Step

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How Different It Is for Our Children!



On the first day of school the teachers got the parents involved in playing with the children. We made paper fish together, wrote good wishes for our new school children, and listened to a story the teacher told us. The kids were delighted; the parents looked a little confused. I must admit that I was not expecting something like that, and neither were most of the other parents. You know how it was in our time—the parents would accompany the children to the school gate; the headmaster and the teacher would greet everyone, then take the children into the classrooms and that was it. Most of the children would look after their parents in horror, and the parents felt as if they had handed their children over to a system in which they had no influence and to which they contribute nothing. The summer break has been fun and games, visits to grandmothers and relatives, bathing in the sea. But not a day goes by without a school friend being

mentioned, a school event talked of, and I'm sure the teachers often have the feeling that someone is thinking of them. And then suddenly: "Mum, when will school start? I can hardly wait!" What more can I say?

— Letter of a Year 2 Mum from Samobor Primary School

What is a Step by Step class like?

The classroom looks like a children's room

We got a carpet and joined up the desks

We have circle time, and the circle becomes a heart

We have rights in order to keep them

We have decorated the classroom, brought flowers in

— Tajna Vran, 4th grade

I spent three weeks preparing the workshop for parents, going over the aims of the workshop, how it would run, what exercises it would involve. Everything

seemed O.K. For most of the parents this was their first child at school, the first time they were coming to a parents' meeting. Many of them had been my pupils. I thought nothing could go wrong. I welcomed the parents at the classroom door. First Muhamed holding a bag, then Miso with a holdall, then Damir, then Neno. I'm standing there thinking, what's going on, why so many dads, usually it's the mums attending? Here comes Grandpa Franc, then Zoran. They are all holding something. We go into the classroom and sit down. The dads start taking out of the bags pliers, drills, paints, nails, saws. What's all this? And then it occurs to me—the invitation letter said "Workshop Agenda: Parents Efficacy. Please come prepared." Without waiting for my instructions, they set to the task at hand. They put up new coat hangers, painted the radiators, fixed a thousand odd jobs. And my workshop? I put it off till the next term!

— Dragica Varat, primary school teacher



Czech Republic

Step by Step Czech Republic

Step by Step Czech Republic (SbS-CR) is a non-profit organization that was established in 1994 to implement the Step by Step Program, as well as other projects that focus on educational reform and development of civil society. SbS-CR supports the development of a democratic society, the improvement of the quality of and access to life-long education, and motivating individuals and communities to build a tolerant, multicultural society.

SbS-CR provides professional training opportunities for in-service and pre-service teachers, as well as for faculty in universities and teacher training institutions. SbS-CR has gained accreditation from the Ministry of Education for in-service teacher education, as well as for verifying the quality of educational programs in Step by Step pre-schools and primary schools.

The SbS-CR network currently includes 85 kindergartens, 75 mainstream schools, 7 special schools, and 5 pedagogical faculties. SbS-CR has provided services to 1,266,961 children over the past decade.

Current projects include:

- Regional training site
- ISSA certification
- Inclusion of children with special educational needs
- Children's books web publishing
- Anti-bias Education for All
- Phare Program—Support to the Roma integration project
- Socrates Program—teacher training to support cultural heritage
- Jakhora —Supporting Roma education in preschools
- Comenius Project ASSET—developing teachers' understanding of belonging to the European community
- Support of Roma NGO
- Re-qualification course for Roma teacher assistants

Partners:

- *Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Czech Republic*
- *Information Center for Nonprofit Organizations*
- *Lancaster & Moracable College, Dublin, Ireland*
- *Open Society Foundation—Prague*
- *Open Society Institute—New York*
- *Socrates National Agency Prague*
- *RWCT—Critical Thinking NGO*
- *New School Foundation Prague*



Step by Step Czech Republic

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A Ten-Year Journey through Change

As we look back at the implementation of the Step by Step Program, we see that the methodology and philosophy of in-service teacher training enables us to discover our ability to deal with and manage change in our school practices.



Changes in the training strategies:

“The training consisted largely of learning-by-doing. We gained knowledge simultaneously at the theoretical and practical levels. At first, it bothered me that no one said, ‘That’s right. That’s how it should be.’ In the end, our experience and our discussions with others facilitated the learning. Later I understood that this was the whole point of the training and of the Step by Step Program in general. I stopped being annoyed and started to really enjoy it.”

— Radka Sobolova, Teacher at the elementary school Angelovova, Prague

Changes in teaching techniques:

“As soon as you feel you know it all, it’s the beginning of the end. Learning is lifelong. There is always something to improve or something new to consider. It’s simply never finished!”

— Michal Cerny, Principal of elementary school in Klanovice, Prague

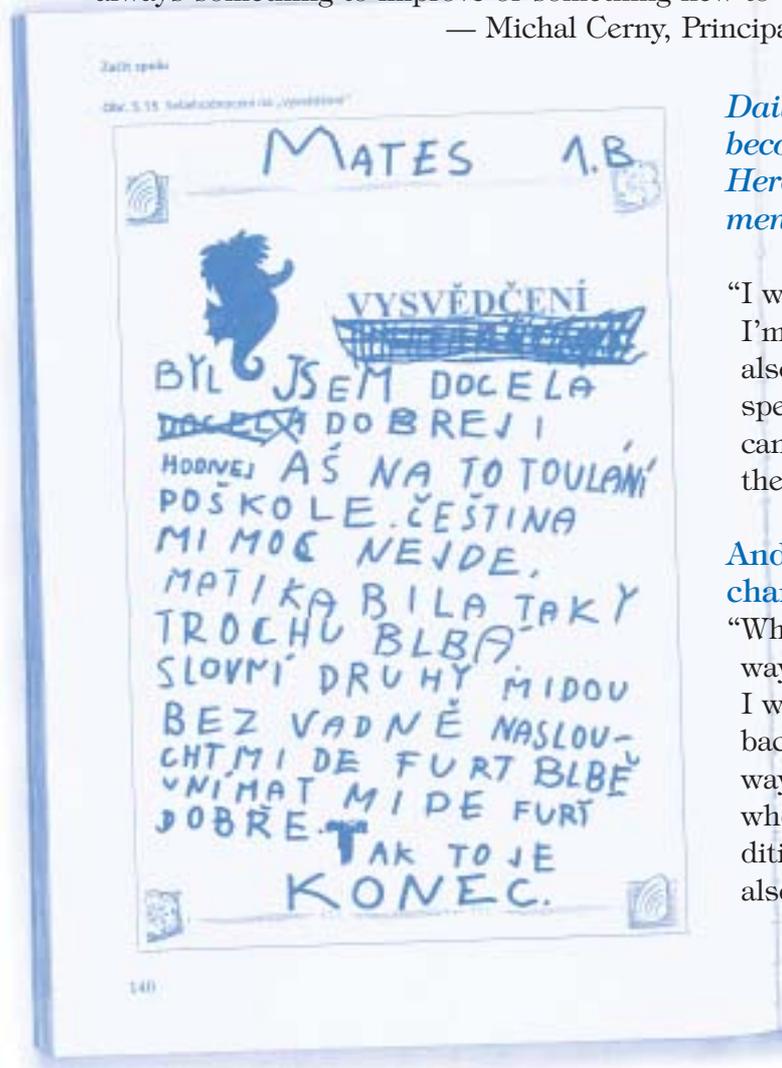
Daily, teachers encourage children to become skillful judges of their own work. Here is an example of Mates self assessment after his first year.

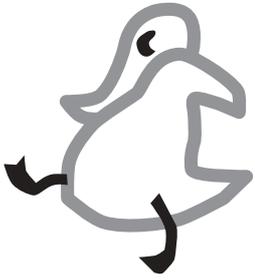
“I was quite good and nice except for recess. I’m not very good in Czech, and math was also kind of stupid. I’m great at parts of speech. Listening is still hard for me. But I can understand other people well. So, that’s the end.”

And how do teachers describe the path of change?

“Whenever I tried to take the short and easy way, I stumbled. Most of the time, I didn’t feel I was moving forward, but now, when I look back, I can see I’ve come an incredibly long way. It would be impossible for any teacher who accepts this approach to go back to a traditional way of teaching because he or she has also learned a certain philosophy of life.”

— Zdena Raskova, Teacher at the elementary school in Plzen





Estonia

Hea Algus

Hea Algus was founded as an NGO in September 1996 to manage the educational reform program Step by Step in Estonia. A large part of its program activity is directed to in-service training of teachers and their professional supervision. At the same time Hea Algus focuses on education of children from birth to ten years of age, in close collaboration with parents, because the home environment plays an important role in forming a child's understanding of self, community, and future opportunities in society. The target group of the family program is parents-at-risk (e.g., parents of teenagers or those with addictions) and parents of children with special educational needs.

The organization's goals are to introduce methodology that focuses on learning through activity/play and supports independent decision making. The development of child-centered learning environments in schools increases the effectiveness of the work and satisfaction of children, teachers, and parents. Hea Algus also seeks to create a network of educational establishments implementing the Step by Step methodology, laying the foundation for their close cooperation with each other, with universities, and with educational officials.

Hea Algus activities include:

- Designing training modules and materials for pre- and primary-school teachers and providing training.
- Translating, editing, and publishing methodological materials necessary for program operation.
- Including the Hea Algus methodology in higher education programs for preschool and primary teachers.
- Active parent involvement in the activities of Hea Algus.
- Developing evaluation criteria and assessing different components of the program.
- Analyzing and developing Hea Algus home-based program activities to support families in coping with their problems.
- Cooperation with groups in other countries who share our goals.

At the end of 2002, 363 preschool and 304 primary classrooms were working according to the Step by Step methodology. All counties in Estonia are involved. Seventy classrooms are working in Russian-speaking schools.

The Hea Algus Koolituskeskus (Training Center) was registered in March 2000. The training center holds all legal rights to translate and use ISSA training materials in Estonia. The majority of training courses are designed to serve kindergarten- and primary school teachers. Most of the training courses are available in both Estonian and Russian.



Hea Algus

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Opinions of parents:

“Our family found a great friend when a family visitor from the Step by Step family program visited us. She was expected weekly, and we were always engaged in fun and useful activities. The family visitor gave us great ideas and many useful hints regarding educating our children.”

“I will never regret my choice to put my children in a Step by Step classroom. I like that the group is open-hearted.”



Funny stories from children:

Preschool teacher: “Taavi, what did you see in your dreams today?”

Taavi: “I didn’t really watch them today.”

A doll lost her head during play.
Little Lauri: “If I lost my head, I would cry as loud as I could.”

Little Kätlin to Merit: “You should eat the fatback pieces in your soup!”
Merit: “No, I should not, because it is fatty and makes one pregnant.”

Little Uku is brushing his teeth: “I took a very large piece of water to my mouth!”



Opinions of children:

Little Rasmus (Age 4) about Step by Step teachers: “I like best that the teachers are good, and they will always help if you are in trouble. And also they will understand things that others cannot.”

“I like that my mother and father are taking part in our games in Step by Step groups. And they also tell us things necessary for life.”

“I can make my own rules here and even cut with a knife by myself!”



Georgia

Center for Educational Initiatives

The Step by Step program began in Georgia in 1997. The Center for Educational Initiatives seeks to expand the adoption of the Step by Step Program and have it serve as an educational model for Georgia. The program provides training in using democratic teaching strategies to teachers, administrators, parents, higher education faculty, and government and community members. The Center aims to:

- Increase the number of schools using Step by Step methodology
- Establish model sites
- Establish inclusive classrooms
- Provide parent leadership training
- Increase higher education involvement

Educational reforms are occurring in the following programs:

- Infant Toddler Program
- Preschool Program
- Primary School Program
- Higher Education Initiative

The program has expanded into 424 classrooms, serving 11,448 children. Five model preschool sites and two model primary sites opened in 2002. Two teacher-training institutions are reforming the curricula to include Step by Step methodologies and principles. More than 1,500 teachers have been trained and are using the methodologies in their classrooms. Children with special needs are taught along with their peers in the regular classroom. Staff reach out to refugee children and their families to make sure they are part of the Step by Step community.

Partners:

- *World Bank Social Investment Fund (SIF)*
- *Care International—West Georgia Community Mobilization Initiative (WGCMI)*



Center for Educational Initiatives

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Parents Salute the Step by Step Program in Georgia

An open, democratic society in Georgia is still in the process of formation. The “Rose Revolution” showed that Georgian society has taken significant steps toward building a democratic state. The Step by Step Program in Georgia has contributed toward the formation of an open society through community building and active parent involvement.

Letters from parents speak for themselves:

“When I learnt about the new Step by Step Program, I felt both interested and skeptical. ‘Will it be a positive change?’ I remember my own school experience. My mother was not even allowed to enter the classroom; there was a sign on the door saying: ‘Parents are not allowed.’ Teachers were demanding, giving endless orders and directions. Children had to memorize rhymes, and I lived with the awful feeling that I would never be ‘one of the best.’ After the presentation about the Step by Step Program, I felt ready to experience at least some of the changes. I brought my 4-year old daughter to the classroom and in about 6 weeks my skepticism totally disappeared. My daughter never asked me to let her stay at home, as I used to do. I observed her becoming more independent, open, and responsible.”

— D. Antelava

“The totally new approach changed parents from passive observers to enthusiastic participants. This model of the classroom gave me a chance to establish close relations with the teachers and children.”

— M. Shelidze

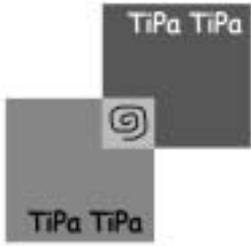
“Since my daughter has been attending the Step by Step Program, I use every free moment to visit the classroom. Extraordinary parent/teacher meetings and participation in different activities made it clear to me that this is the best program for children and families. It gives kids the chance to be happy, get used to independent thinking, and become active, responsible, and caring citizens in the future.”

— M. Kalandaze-Osepashvili

“I am sure that children brought up in Step by Step classrooms will make the world better.”

— I. Surmava





Haiti

FOKAL

FOKAL (Foundation Konesans as Liberete) was founded in 1991 in Haiti—a country marked by dictatorship and violence and plagued by illiteracy, unemployment, a shortage of resources, extreme poverty, and uncontrolled population growth. FOKAL's work focuses on education (Step by Step Program, teacher training, debate program) and information (library program, Internet). Special emphasis is placed on integrating marginalized populations in the process of school reform as a way to structure communities around their schools and to facilitate interaction between populations and institutions. FOKAL has deliberately chosen children and youth as its target group and has the great ambition to provide access to knowledge, books, the Internet, tools of scientific learning, and the opportunity to all for life as equal citizens. FOKAL's programs seek to facilitate openings to the world and to develop individual and collective empowerment and responsibility.

Tipa Tipa / Step by Step Haiti

Tipa Tipa / Step by Step Haiti is a program of FOKAL, one of the Soros network foundations.

Tipa Tipa is a school program for children birth to 12 and their families. This program offers quality and modern education opportunities to children from disadvantaged environments, using an individualized child-centered approach. The program also encourages participation of the families and local communities.

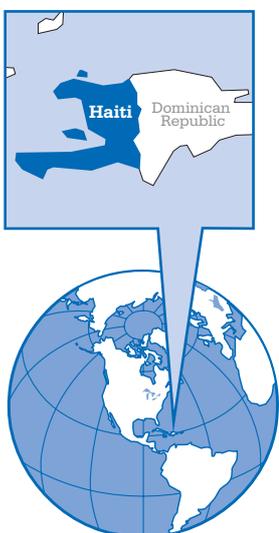
The program has built five model preschools and has helped seven schools renovate their preschool buildings and general facilities. A total of 28 schools (12 preschools and 16 primary schools) are now equipped with developmentally appropriate classroom furniture. Fifteen schools involved in the program have received educational materials for preschool and grades one and two. Teachers from all 28 schools have received training on educational strategies for preschool through grade six. More

than 9,000 children have passed through Step by Step classrooms in Haiti, and 659 teachers have been trained.

Teachers of these schools are not only introduced to the child-centered approach but are also given instruction in teaching methods for mathematics, experimental sciences, social sciences, art, Creole, language development, and French as a second language. Issues concerning health, nutrition, and hygiene are offered to teachers, children, families, and other interested community members. Families receive specific training in organizational skills and strategies for supporting learning activities at home.

The specific challenges encountered by Tipa Tipa include:

- Training teachers with very low general education levels.
- Training teachers with almost no teacher training.
- Difficult access and communication problems with schools located in remote areas.



FOKAL's Tipa Tipa Program (Step by Step Program)

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Step by Step Haiti: *Breaking habits, forgetting the old fashion ways, changing paradigms*

Children Learning

In this Step by Step kindergarten classroom, equipped with furniture and materials from the local Step by Step program, everybody is busy working in activity centers. The teacher provides individualized instruction to a small group while the rest of the children know exactly what to do and where to go.

Teachers Learning

Beautiful, full of learning and hope, the text *How Teachers and Parents Can Avoid Using the Stick*, is shared by Augustin, a second grade Step by Step teacher. He has been teaching for 10 years, and as he says, "I have been a good teacher." However, through Step by Step training and an understanding of developmental stages, he has discovered, "the stick is unfair and can even be criminal; using it generates violence, fear, grudges, and hostility. Instead, you can use dialogue, conviviality, humor, affection, courtesy, and mutual respect."



Children and Teachers Learning Together

This is a classroom that had no funding for furniture or materials. The creative teachers changed their old classroom and their teaching methods. The major physical change made is the addition of a set of square tables where children face each other and do not sit in rows. They now work enthusiastically on a group project at each table.

Everyone Learning

Morning meetings: Children talking, not just repeating as before. Children are encouraged to talk freely, to share feelings, experiences, ideas, fears and trauma, dreams and hopes. Having access to free words, children take the risk of being oneself—creative, daring, sorry, and playful.

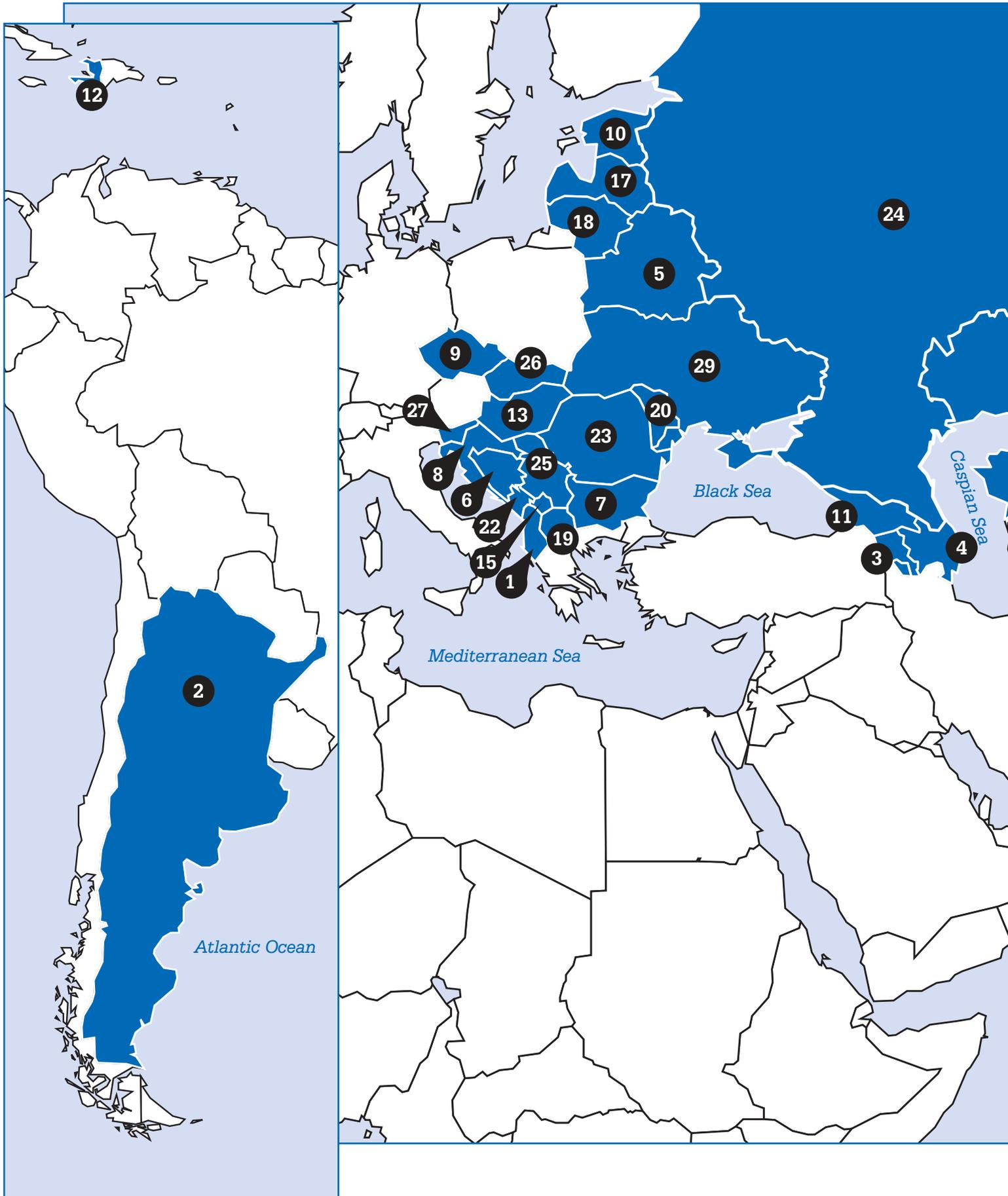
A Country Learning

Although Step by Step Haiti has been going through very stormy times in the past two years, its team members are unified in their love for the program and for the purpose it

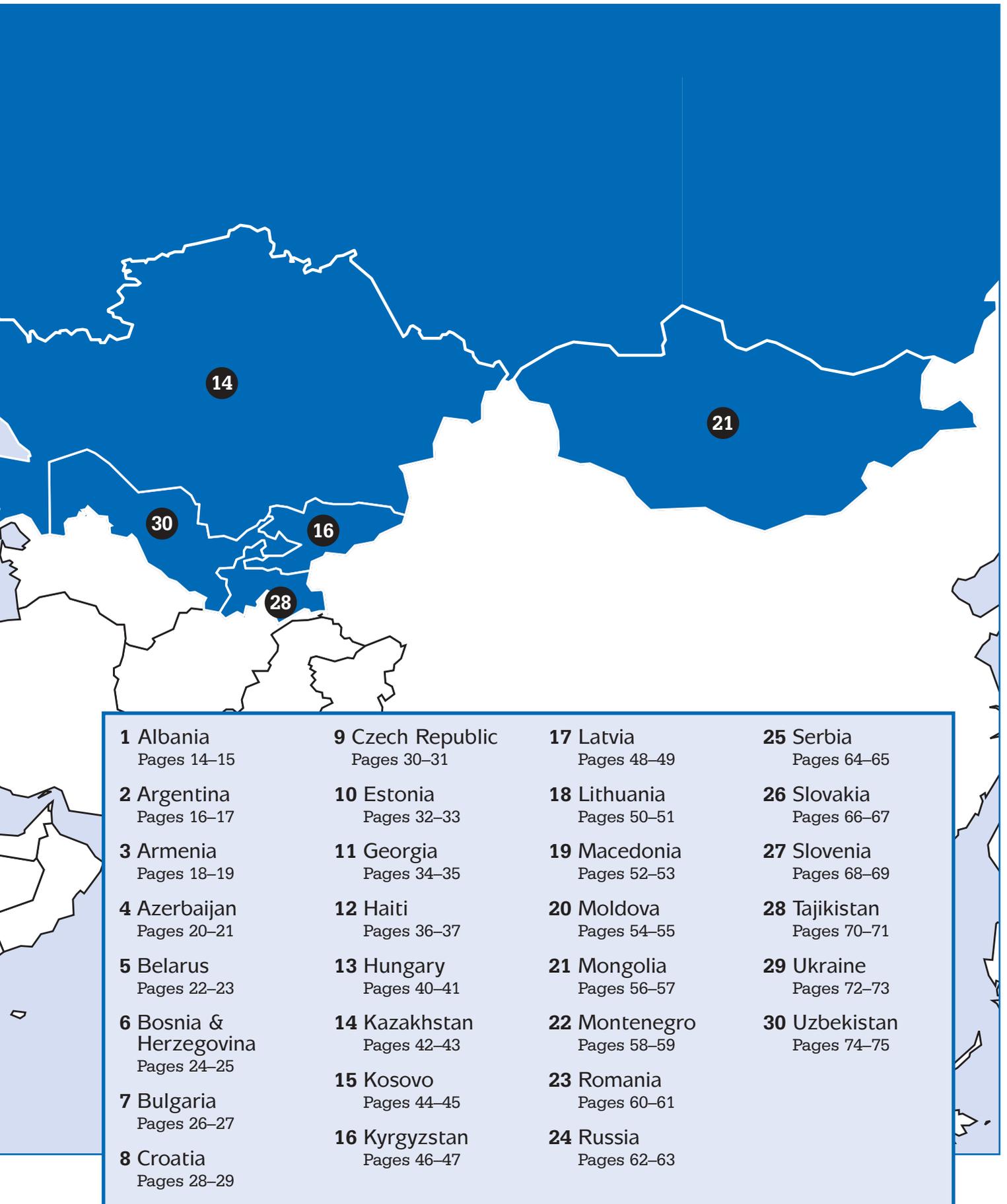
has given their lives. Team solidarity enables them to keep the dream alive. Step by Step may currently be the best instrument to affect change through education.



International Step by Step As



Association—A Global Network





Hungary

Ec-Pec Foundation

Established in February 2001, the Ec-Pec Foundation's mission is to promote Step by Step child-centered methodology in preschools and primary schools educating socially and economically disadvantaged children, especially Roma children and their families. All of the programs have the common mission of helping children achieve school success.

Our experience and research results show that social disadvantage leads to disadvantage in the classroom and that the initial setbacks eventually lead to students falling so far behind that they have no chance of catching up with their peers. We believe that social disadvantage does not affect ability; it only limits possibilities. The child-centered approach offers a feasible solution.

We know that we cannot complete this job on our own, so we seek the cooperation of teachers, parents, students, municipalities, labor organizations, representatives of the public sphere, and other organizations with similar visions. We base all our initiatives on the assumption that improvement cannot occur without the active participation of those involved.

As a member in the International Step by Step Association (ISSA), we participate in ISSA's quality management program to ensure high standards in implementing the Step by Step Program and high quality job performance by educators and trainers. Our training programs include basic Step by Step training for teachers in preschool, Grades 1 and 2, and Grades 3 and 4. We also provide thematic training related to the Step by Step Program covering the following topics:

- Project planning—use of activity centers in the child-centered classroom. Ways to integrate subject matter.
- Differentiation—cooperative learning and peer assistance.
- Child observation and ongoing

evaluation—alternative methods.

- Global reading and writing—the creative writing process and the development of critical thinking.
- Project-related work in teaching mathematics.
- Natural sciences—learning by experience and use of the research log.

Partners:

The Ec-Pec Foundation played an active role in establishing the Step by Step for Critical Thinking Association, which provides ongoing professional support for educators, a forum for discussing and sharing ideas, and supports new initiatives and the creation of professional groups. This association promotes both the Step by Step Program and the Program for Critical Thinking. This latter provides a continuation in the upper grades of the Step by Step Program. Thus the Ec-Pec Foundation, in cooperation with the Association, is able to provide a reform program for public educational institutions from the preschool level through grade 8 (intermediate). Other partners include:

- *Open Society Institute—New York*
- *Soros Foundation*
- *Ministry of Education*
- *Ministry of Education PHARE Office*
- *Public Foundation for Hungarian National and Ethnic Minorities*
- *Council of Europe*
- *Prime Minister's Office*
- *International Step by Step Association*



Ec-Pec Foundation

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Ec-Pec Foundation



Co-operative learning in practice (above)
Basics of the Step by Step Program: One of our publications (above, right)



Services for Teachers and Schools

Ec-Pec introduced the Step by Step Program into the Hungarian system of in-service teacher training. Our goal is to continue to provide up-to-date training that is individualized to meet the teachers' and institutions' developmental needs. As we continue to learn, the Step by Step methodology

is enriched with new elements. Mentor and program evaluation services are offered to assist schools in more effective school improvement.

Books and videos are published by Ec-Pec to support teachers' professional development.

"I've learned that I have to be open in order to appreciate as many views as possible."

— A teacher who has participated in the training

Trainers

Our training sessions are conducted by 20 qualified educators who are also active teachers in the Step by Step program. To maintain high professional standards, special emphasis is placed on continuous professional development for our trainers.

Community Development

We collaborate with community partners and work closely with families, local authorities, professional organizations, and other NGOs.

"Social change and the changing environment creates new needs in education and makes new methods necessary. We can never be content with our existent knowledge."

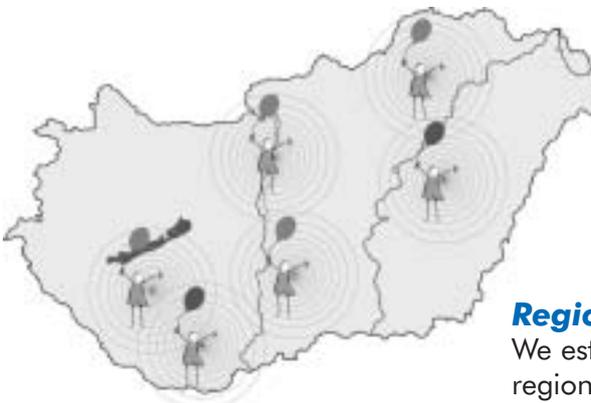
— A teacher participating in one of our projects



Learning is fun!



An example of an out of school activity



Regional Training Centres

We established a national network of model school sites and regional training centers in order to provide locally accessible training and professional support throughout the country.



Kazakhstan

Public Community Soros Educational Step by Step Center

The Public Community Soros Educational Step by Step Center was founded by the Soros Foundation Kazakhstan in 1998. The mission of our organization is to form a new generation of active citizens who appreciate the values inherent in a democratic way of life.

Step by Step's model child-centred program was developed by the Open Society Institute in partnership with Georgetown University. The program encompasses three major childhood initiatives: constructivism, developmentally appropriate practices, and progressive education. The program's methodology is based on child-centered teaching, with an emphasis on individualizing learning experiences for each child; assisting children in making choices through planned activity; and parent and community involvement.

Step by Step's methodology promotes a way of teaching that is new to Kazakhstan. We work with all levels of education: kindergartens, schools, pedagogical colleges, institutes/universities, and teacher re-training institutes.

In Kazakhstan, Step by Step started its activities in 1996 as a pilot project in six regions, as a program of the Soros Foundation Kazakhstan. Since then, Step by Step has trained more than 1,900 teachers to use an innovative methodology that promotes active learning, personal responsibility, initiation, and parent involvement. A team of leading specialists of the Departments of Education has been trained to develop special child-centered courses for teaching students. As a result, student teachers complete their practicum in Step by Step classrooms and write their diplomas and course work on child-centered methods. In collaboration with teacher re-training institutes, Step by Step has

designed courses, methodological recommendations, and practical guidelines for teachers and parents.

Step by Step has an official agreement with the Ministry of Education and local governments. The Ministry included Step by Step in the activity plan for 2000-2005 to implement democratic approaches for preschool-age students (age 6-7) and primary school (Grades 1-4).

Center activities include:

- Training teachers to create a learning atmosphere based on mutual respect and democratic principles by introducing interactive teaching methods that promote students' individuality;
- Training parents and community members to become active advocates of their children;
- Training early childhood faculty to change methods of preparation for future teachers;
- Providing technical and methodological assistance to Step by Step schools, particularly in rural areas;
- Supporting the creation of inclusive classrooms as an alternative model of deinstitutionalization of children with special needs;
- Supporting professional growth of specialists and psychologists, both in their teaching and research practices;
- Promoting continuity of developmentally appropriate practices at the middle school level.



Public Community Soros Educational Step by Step Center

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Public Community Soros Educational Step by Step Center – *Kazakhstan*



The world is big enough and very often love and hate are very close, but children are the same everywhere, and they need our help.

One of the Step by Step schools was to close down. A parent shares her experience: "We never expected that one day it would be possible to go against a government's decision. Our mentality has changed because of being involved in Step by Step. We know that only through collaboration do we have a chance to reach success. We couldn't imagine that our children should stay at home and have no access to quality education, and we did it!"

Parents share: "Most of us have no idea how to help our children at home, and the teachers help us understand the skills we need. We are welcome in the classroom, and it makes us proud to observe the achievements of the children. Before the Step by Step Program parents were not welcome in the classroom, and we had no idea what teachers actually did."

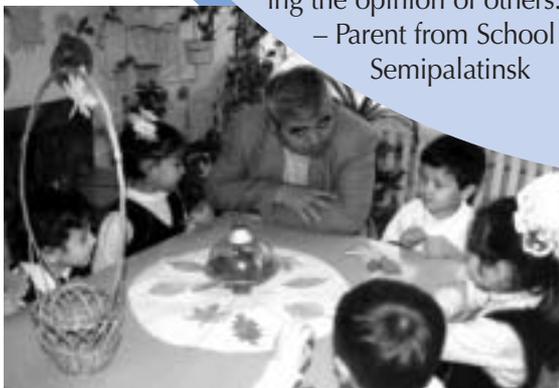
"We do hope to make our world better, more kind, and decrease the possibilities of seeing the sad and painful eyes of our children. They deserve to be happy."

A teacher discusses inclusion of children with special needs: "Healthy children serve as models in the development of social and emotional habits for children with special educational needs. Their communication has a positive impact on their morals, gives lessons in sympathizing, and encourages feelings of empathy. Being in school together helps overcome stereotypes of disabilities. This program helps everyone understand that all children deserve an equal start in life so they can feel part of the worthy civil society of sovereign Kazakhstan."

– M.Legotina, School #4, Kzylorda

My son has retarded mental development. Up until age eight he wasn't welcome in any school; now he is here. He has learned to be more self-sufficient. He can put on his boots independently. He has friends. He can stand his ground, and at the same time he is capable of appreciating the opinion of others."

– Parent from School #7, Semipalatinsk





Kosovo

Kosovo Education Center

Compared to other countries in the region, only a small percentage of Kosovar children participate in early childhood education. Poverty (there is a monthly fee), discouraging conditions (poor physical facilities, low salaries for staff), a routine of discipline and strict obedience played out in gray and dull classrooms, combined with traditional patriarchal Kosovar values, have resulted in the decision to let children stay at home with their mothers or with other members of the extended family such as grandparents. Large families, which result in a lot of emotional support to the children, are rare in the modern technological world. Step by Step in Kosovo took advantage of this traditional strength to attract the lively children of big families to its preschool program. Step by Step in Kosovo stresses that the seeds of reform, aiming for the kind of education which enables the growth of free personalities, have to be planted in the very first phase of education.

By undertaking the task of reform of the early childhood sector, the Step by Step Program sets the foundation for raising awareness about the kind of youth we need to build a prosperous, democratic, and tolerant society in the future. The program aims to establish the criteria of bringing up free individuals, shaped by a system of education that will directly contribute to the development of a strong civil society and the improvement of Kosovar society. What is more important, this program reinforces our cultural tradition. We build on the practice of bringing up children within a wider community by incorporating active parent participation in the implementation of the program.

The Step by Step Program operates in 758 preschool classrooms and 105 primary school classrooms, reaching a total of 21,600 children. Ten faculty members teach new courses and 1,498 teachers participate in the program. Step by Step operates in six minority preschool classrooms (Roma, Bosnian, Turkish), ensuring multiethnic participation in the program.

The Step by Step Program has organized basic and advanced training

for preschool and primary school teachers and has established three training centers in Kosovo. It has provided existing preschool classrooms with educational materials and furniture and has established the Parents' Room, which encourages the inclusion of the family as an important factor within the Step by Step methodology. Both parents and teachers are eager to embrace child-centered and interactive methods that promote tolerance, critical thinking, and free choice. After a decade of isolation, Step by Step has provided the roots for a reformed educational system.

Step by Step has helped the University of Prishtina Pedagogy Department to update their information about teaching child-centered methodology by providing a seminar in Tirana on this topic. It has also initiated the publication of illustrated books for preschool children.

Partners:

- UNICEF
- Save the Children
- International Rescue Committee
- Catholic Relief Service
- Feed the Children
- Arbeiter Samariter Bund



Kosovo Education Center

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My Step by Step Classroom

"I'm very proud that I belong to the first generation of the Step by Step Program. I think that we are the best. I hope other generations will have an even better education. We should thank those who arranged our classroom and trained our teacher."

— Albert Vishi, Grade 3

"During the morning meeting we learn a lot of new things from our teacher and also from our friends. I also like when we meet together at the end of the day and discuss what we have learned."

— Plator Abazi, Grade 3

"I like my classroom a lot. I think time in school is very short, because we would all like to play, learn, sing, and dance more."

— Rega Gashi, Grade 2

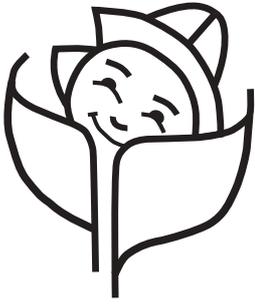
"In my classroom I feel very good. If I don't understand something, I can consult with my friend. I also like the way we change activity centers."

— Klesta Hamzaj, Grade 2

"After the war, many organizations and donors offered to help in economics and rebuilding, but what I found more important was when these organizations provided assistance with education. When my daughter became six years old, I decided to send her to a Step by Step classroom. I'm really glad I did and after three years we, as parents, are very thankful to the school, the teachers, and the George Soros Foundation for equipping the classrooms and training the teachers to work with new methods."

— Shukrije Bytyqi-Ferizaj, parent





Kyrgyzstan

Center of Educational Initiatives Shag za shagom

The Center of Educational Initiatives, Shag za shagom, is a non-governmental and nonprofit organization established to promote educational reform in Kyrgyzstan. It aims to support innovative ideas that help to democratize education and advocate for the rights of children and their families. The center recognizes the right to education for all children, their families, and community members.

The mission of the Center of Educational Initiatives, Shag za shagom, is to introduce child-oriented teaching methods in preschools and primary and comprehensive schools; provide access to education for children from families of national minorities, refugees, and children with disabilities; and to support the development of civil society. The center collaborates with the Ministry of Education and Culture and has a license to carry out teacher training activities.

The program began in 1995 with 7 kindergartens and is currently being implemented in 82 preschool classrooms, 436 primary school classrooms, and 4 teacher training institutions. Eleven training centers have been established in different regions of Kyrgyzstan.

Center activities include:

- Expansion of the Step by Step Program.
- Implementation of the project "Participation, Education, and Knowledge Strengthening" (PEAKS), funded by the United States Agency for International Development and the Open Society Institute (OSI).
- Implementation of the project "Integrated Development of Children and Preparation for School," supported by UNICEF and OSI.
- Development and support of training centers.
- Development and provision of teacher training for all levels (preschools, primary schools, comprehensive schools, and universities).
- Demonstration of the effective model of teaching.
- Implementation of the program in SOS Hermann Gmeiner School in Kyrgyzstan.
- Development of partnerships with organizations concerned with education and child rearing.
- Cooperation with educational establishments, families, and community members.

Partners:

- *Save the Children UK*
- *UNICEF*
- *Ministry of Education and Culture*
- *Pedagogical universities and colleges*
- *SOS Kinderdorf*
- *CIMERA Switzerland*

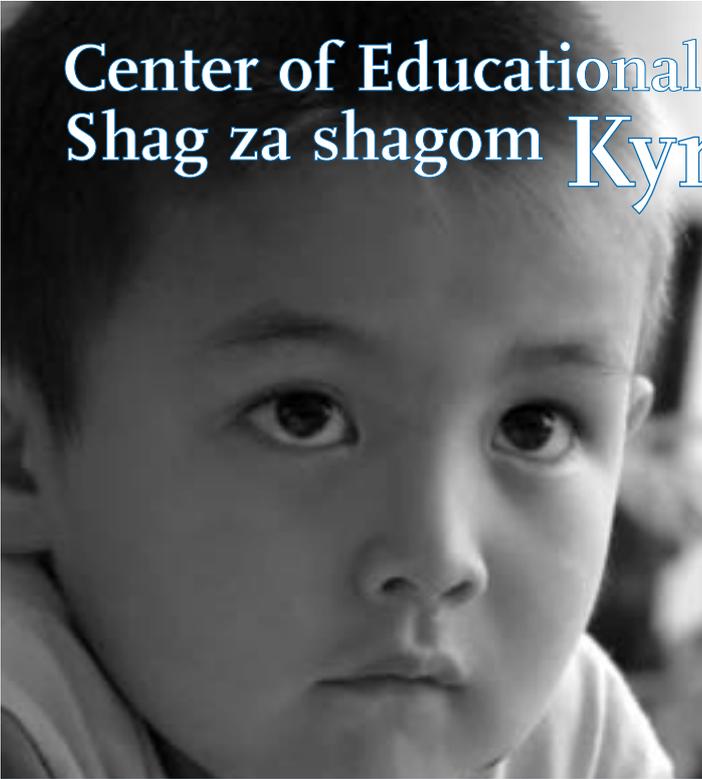
Center of Educational Initiatives, Shag za shagom

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Center of Educational Initiatives Shag za shagom Kyrgyzstan



Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities, and needs in education.



Every child has the right to educational opportunities that support and encourage his/her individual learning.





Latvia

Center for Education Initiatives

The implementation of the Step by Step Program in Latvia started in 1997 as a project of the Soros Foundation–Latvia. To maintain the Step by Step Program activities and network of schools and preschools that were involved in the project, a nonprofit organization, the Center for Education Initiatives (CEI), was established in the beginning of 2001. The aim of CEI is to raise awareness about children and family rights in society, to promote the dissemination of the ideas of democratic education and to facilitate the introduction and adoption of a child-centered approach in the educational system of Latvia. The Step by Step network is now widespread throughout the country, involving schools and preschools from all regions of Latvia. New Step by Step classrooms are opened every school year with the support of the local/regional governments and parents.

To reach its aims, CEI implements the following activities:

- Advocate for policy to ensure that every child—regardless of gender, race, religion, nationality, or ability—has the opportunity to develop to his or her full potential.
- Provide in-service training and technical assistance on early childhood education and parent/community involvement to teachers and other education professionals, parents, and policy makers. The CEI offers 39 different seminars and workshops.
- Develop new teacher resources and learning materials for early-age learners, oriented for use in child-centered classrooms.
- Lend materials from its resource center.
- Develop new training programs according to the data collected about the most urgent needs of educators and parents.

The Step by Step Program currently operates in 532 preschool classrooms serving 10,455 children and 269 primary school classrooms serving 6,160 children. Step by Step training has reached 4,939 teachers in Latvia. In addition, more than 1,500 parents and representatives of local governments and non-governmental organizations have participated in the training.

The CEI organization includes a network of seven Teacher Training Centers, covering all parts of Latvia, which operate with the aim of strengthening the most successful Step by Step model sites, disseminating the ideas of the program, and providing student practice.

In June 2000 a unique civic organization, the Step by Step Parent Association, was founded by parents from different regions of Latvia. The association encourages public awareness and advocacy for equality and quality in education, facilitates the educational reforms focused on implementing the child-centered approach to teaching and learning, and promotes parent and community participation in education. The association organizes annual conferences and has been involved in discussions in the mass media about urgent issues of early childhood education reform, advocating for inclusion of children with special needs and minority children (Roma), and for a new understanding of the aims, content, and methods of education.

Partners:

The CEI implements its projects with financial support from *the Open Society Institute, the European Commission Phare and Socrates programs*, and local/regional governments.



Center for Education Initiatives

Contact: Zenija Berzina

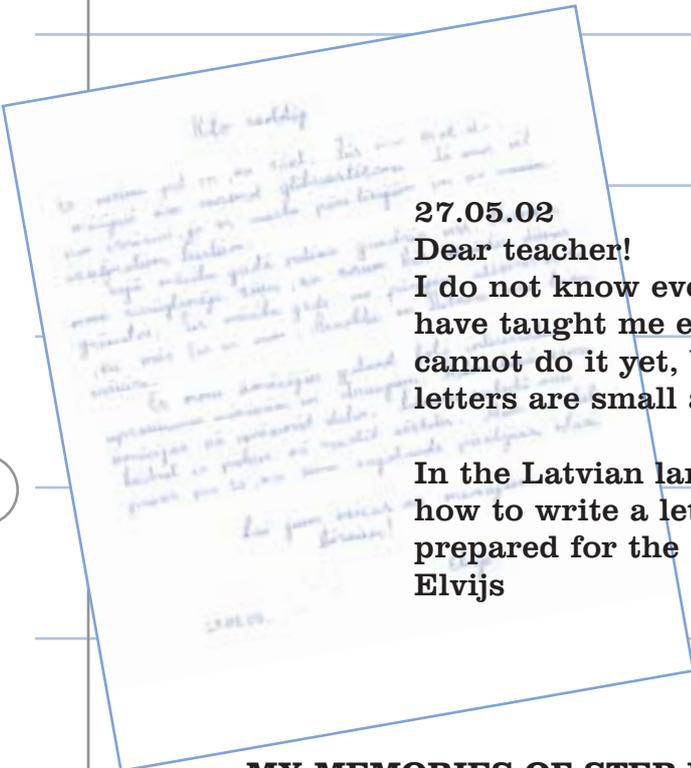
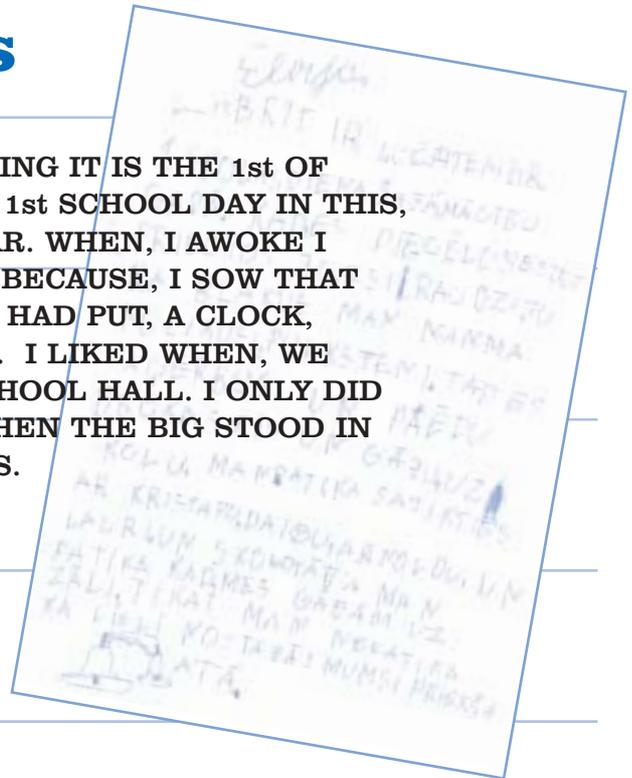
E-mail: info@iic.lv or zenija@iic.lv

Victory for Elvijs



01.09.98.

GOOD MORNING IT IS THE 1st OF SEPTEMBER 1st SCHOOL DAY IN THIS, SCHOOL YEAR. WHEN, I AWOKE I FELT HAPPY BECAUSE, I SAW THAT MY MOTHER HAD PUT, A CLOCK, BESIDES ME. I LIKED WHEN, WE WENT TO SCHOOL HALL. I ONLY DID NOT LIKE WHEN THE BIG STOOD IN FRONT OF US. BYE.



27.05.02

Dear teacher!

I do not know even how to start this letter. You have taught me everything except calligraphy. I cannot do it yet, because I write over lines and my letters are small and disfigured.

In the Latvian language I have understood at last how to write a letter. I am very happy that I am prepared for the 5th grade.

Elvijs

MY MEMORIES OF STEP BY STEP PRIMARY SCHOOL

May 13, 2004.

I liked primary school very much. That is because we had a lot of different toys, books, games, and we had good tables. We received a good education due to our teacher. Our teacher was, and is, the best.

We had a lesson "quiet reading." At the end of the lesson somebody retold the book, which he had read.

My friend and I liked to build houses out of blocks. That was our favorite activity.

In the morning when the lessons begun we all sat down in a circle, we took each others hands, and then the teacher shook the hand of a child next to her, and so around the circle till the teacher got her greeting back.

I liked to learn in the Soros classroom very much.



Elvijs Zalitis



Lithuania

Center for Innovative Education

The Center for Innovative Education (CIE) was established in April 2000 to continue the international educational program Step by Step, which began in 1994 as a project of the Open Society Fund–Lithuania. The establishment of CIE created a non-governmental organization actively promoting values of an open society and equal access to a quality education for all children in Lithuania.

The mission of CIE is to support and promote educational change in an effort to ensure high quality teaching and learning to meet the requirements of an open and democratic society. CIE programs help social and ethnic minorities integrate into Lithuanian society and encourage tolerance toward every member of the community.

Activities of the CIE cover the educational system at every level. The Step by Step Program promotes child-centered methodologies in nurseries, preschools, and primary and secondary schools. Courses in child-centered methodology are offered at three pedagogical universities in Vilnius, Klaipėda, and Šiauliai.

CIE activities include:

- Professional training on implementing child-centered education at each level of the educational system.
- Projects that promote equal opportunities for minorities, Roma, and disabled children and encourage respect for diversity.
- Publication of books and other teaching materials.

CIE provides more than 60 training sessions annually at nine CIE training centers. More and more teachers are implementing child-centered methods in their classrooms—between 1994 and 2004 the Step by Step Program in Lithuania grew from 10 classrooms to over 800 classrooms.

The Step by Step Program is officially recognized by the Ministry of Education and Science. The government has approved CIE teacher training programs, and CIE has been granted permission to issue certificates of accomplishment.

Partners:

CIE works closely with the *Ministry of Education*, divisions for education of municipalities, universities, higher pedagogical schools, institutes for professional training, educational centers, and non-governmental organizations.



Center for Innovative Education

Contact: Regina Sabaliauskiene

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Celebrating the 10th Anniversary of the Step by Step Program in Lithuania.



Each of us can contribute.



We have foreign student-teachers in our school often. This time Monique and Diane from the Netherlands teach us and learn from us.



We like to draw.



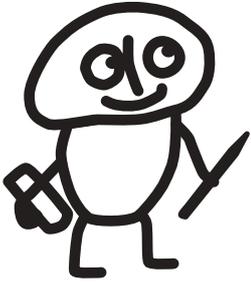
Our teacher knows so many interesting things.



Our trainers Stephanie and Vaclav help us to become reliable certifiers. And we will help our best teachers to become internationally recognized professionals.



Training in our training centers is very popular.



Macedonia

Foundation for Educational and Cultural Initiatives Step by Step

The Foundation for Education and Cultural Initiatives is a nonprofit, non-governmental organization formed in 1999. Its mission is to encourage the whole community to develop and implement programs that will assist children in achieving their full potential. This mission is accomplished by improving the quality of educational services in Macedonia through democratization of the teaching process and by supporting equal access for all children to high quality educational opportunities. Educational practices are improved through on-going training and technical assistance to teachers, pedagogues, psychologists, school principals, and parents.

Program strategies include:

- Building partnerships with ministries, teacher training and re-training institutions, local authorities, schools, kindergartens, and national and foreign organizations that share the same vision and objectives.
- Advocating for ongoing training of educational staff and teaching teams in kindergartens, schools, and students from the Pedagogical Faculties.
- Publishing professional manuals, textbooks, children's picture books, and literature that promote our mission.
- Providing children opportunities for creative expression through art forms by promoting partnerships between educational and cultural institutions.

The Foundation lists among its accomplishments:

- The program is currently being implemented in 989 preschool classrooms in Macedonia and in 1,168 primary classrooms in 84 schools.
- Teams of educators from preschool organizations and elementary schools have been trained. These teams include teachers, teaching assistants, school principals, pedagogues, psychologists, and students from the Pedagogical Faculties.
- Teams of educators from 45 primary schools are trained and involved in the project "Creative Teaching and Learning" with the following components: "Step by Step to Critical Thinking" and "School Improvement."
- Education and art materials, teaching accessories, furniture, and equipment have been distributed to classrooms that were extremely resource poor.
- Contributing to the fund of developmentally appropriate children's literature, 11 picture books were published in the Macedonian and Albanian languages.
- Children's Creative Centers have been established in Skopje and Radovis. During the recent refugee crises, Children's Creative Centers were established in Tetovo and Gostivar.



Foundation for Educational and Cultural Initiatives Step by Step

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Our most important success is our contribution to the modernization of the educational process in our country. This was accomplished through the education of teachers of all nationalities, creating a network of schools included in the Step by Step Program, and continuous professional development of teachers. The evaluations and research conducted on the effect of the Step by Step methodology demonstrates its success compared to the traditional teaching methodology.



“When I met S.V. (a child with special needs) for the first time, I noticed how fascinated she was with the new environment (Step by Step classroom). She was particularly impressed with the manipulative corner full of wooden puzzles, and soon solved one of them with my help. She had the opportunity to be successful in many areas, and we encouraged her when she had difficulty. With time, S.V. became more and more independent, and I sometimes wondered if she really needed my help at all.”
— S.V.’s teacher

“It was not long before I concluded that my daughter was spending time in a real environment, surrounded with professionals who always had real solutions for her. The team used various ways of cooperation, not only with me, but with the other parents as well. We regularly discussed daily activities and what was planned for the future. I often volunteered in the classroom, which had a very positive influence on S.V.—she was very happy about it. Whenever she had some task to accomplish, we would work hard, even at home, in order to complete it. I could trust the team who worked with her, since I could see how focused they were on helping my daughter progress. I think that during her three year stay in the Step by Step kindergarten, the trust became mutual. The kindergarten supported my child in becoming stronger and more independent for her future life.”
— S.V.’s mother



Moldova

Programul Educational Pas cu Pas

Step by Step Moldova, a registered NGO, is an organization that supports reform of the educational system through the introduction of child-centered, individualized teaching methodologies and family and community involvement in preschools and primary schools. Step by Step is devoted to protecting the quality and availability of in-service and pre-service training programs, promoting long-term professional development, advocating for parent involvement and child-centered early childhood education programs, and developing quality programs for marginalized groups such as minority or disabled children. The program provides services to many minority children and families—Russian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Jewish, Gagauz, and Roma—including many disadvantaged families living in villages.

The Step by Step Program was initiated in 1994 by the Open Society Institute (NY) as an educational program for preschool children, age three to five. In the following years, to meet the growing demands for continuity, the program was extended to age five to seven. In 1996 a primary school component was added and, in 1997, a birth to three initiative was added. The program is currently operating in 795 preschool classrooms and in 1,194 primary school classrooms. Six schools and kindergartens serve as training centers. In 1996 the program launched a higher education component for pedagogical universities and colleges to change the practices of training preschool and primary teachers. One hundred and seventy faculty members from ten institutions are involved in this process, and 2,100 student teachers have been learning new methods based on child-centered curriculum.

The Step by Step Program is officially recognized by the Ministry of Education as an approved model of child-centered curriculum and is recommended for wide implementation across the country. Step by Step re-training certificates are valid for teachers' accreditation.

In September 2000 the first generation of Step by Step children went to middle school. To ensure a smooth transition to their new level, the program offered middle school teachers training in individualized learning and integrated curriculum. After half a year of schooling, middle school teachers stated in amazement that Step by Step students differ a lot from their students in traditional classrooms by their inquisitiveness, independence in setting learning goals, creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills.

Partners:

Through its partnership with *Social Investment Fund Moldova*—a World Bank project that focuses on alleviation of poverty and community development in rural areas—a school projects initiative has been launched. Presently, Step by Step is seeking new partnerships for its latest component—creating inclusive classrooms that focus on special needs children and their right to quality education in a natural, caring environment, among their peers.

Programul Educational Pas cu Pas

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“Unlike before, we use real-life problems as opportunities for learning, bringing them into the classroom. For example, there was unauthorized parking by neighborhood residents right by the school. It created many problems—starting with safety, ecology, and access. Many formal attempts to stop the parking failed. Then, we discussed with the children what we might do, and they came up with the idea of appealing directly to the residents. They sent the residents their message using multiple methods, while developing, at the same time, various skills.



They drew posters in their art lessons and practiced computer design and written communication skills when writing letters to the residents and officials.”

–*Uliana Boghiu, teacher*

“Thematic studies give us multiple opportunities to use the environment as a resource, which is so valuable in our country, where teaching resources are scarce. One such study was “The Market.” Together with my third graders, we went to



the farmers’ market, where my students interviewed the vendors and the buyers asking many questions about the origin, quality, and cost of goods, as well as the reasons for buyers’ preference in using the market. The students needed to display many skills related to

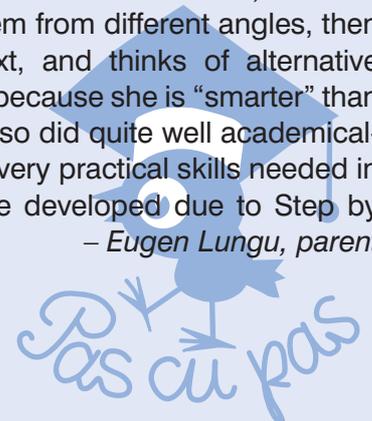


oral and written communication, geography, and math. Back in the classroom they had to make presentations of their findings, thus learning how to organize their data.” –*Victoria Ursu, teacher*



“I see a great difference between how my younger daughter, a fifth grader now, who attended Step by Step from kindergarten, approaches problems differently from her older sister, now 22. The younger one analyzes a problem from different angles, then evaluates the context, and thinks of alternative solutions. This is not because she is “smarter” than the older one, who also did quite well academically; just that there are very practical skills needed in everyday life that she developed due to Step by Step.”

– *Eugen Lungu, parent*





Mongolia

Mongolian Education Alliance

The Step by Step Program is part of the newly established Mongolian Education Alliance. The mission is to support the professional strengthening of Mongolian schools, teachers, and students in their capacity to reform the educational system in accordance with open society values and to foster the social development of their communities.

The goals and activities of the foundation are:

- To provide professional development services to its member schools and teachers. Step by Step in-service training modules will be delivered by national trainers, who will be certified by the Ministry of Education.
- To institutionalize Step by Step concepts in pre-service teacher training. Step by Step is collaborating with teacher training colleges to revise and improve the pre-service teacher education curriculum.
- To act as a policy think-tank as well as a professional stakeholder in the policy development process of the Ministry of Education by supporting policies that promote student-centered learning, community participation, transparency and accountability, and inclusive education and by supporting the revision of educational standards based on the experiences of reform projects that promote child-centered teaching methods, critical thinking skills, and community involvement.
- To demonstrate best practices and models of schooling through its educational reform projects.
- To increase open and equal access to and quality of educational information and resources, especially in rural areas. Outreach activities include providing resource materials to children who are not attending kindergarten and their parents.
- To develop networking of all stakeholders.
- To document and evaluate program impact.
- To encourage local initiatives fostering civic participation in social development.
- To promote sustainability of project initiatives and fundraising.

The Step by Step methodology is active in 267 classrooms in 53 kindergartens and 30 primary classrooms in 19 schools. About 10,000 children and their parents are involved in child-centered programs throughout the country. Three hundred teachers implementing the program deliver the concepts of child-centered methodology to over 1,355 kindergarten teachers through in-service training. Twenty-five teachers and instructors are trained as National Step by Step trainers.



Mongolian Education Alliance

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“Congratulations for the 10th anniversary from sunny Mongolia. I wish you success for the work you do with children around the world!”

– G.Enkhjargal, mother of Tsenguun

“Our family moved from the countryside to Ulaanbaatar City four years ago. Fortunately, our daughter entered the Step by Step class in 1st grade. Once I came and served the children fruit jam. I picked the fruit and cooked it myself. Later the children and parents invited me as a ‘guest teacher’ into the classroom to teach the children how to make fruit jam. Thanks to



the Step by Step Program, teacher-parent-children partnership has increased.”

– D.Enkhtsetseg, mother of Nyamdalai, pupil at Shavi complex school, Ulaanbaatar City, Mongolia



“There are many nice learning materials in our classroom. We make many interesting and cheerful materials with our parents and teachers. My classmates are very friendly

and understand each other well. When I grow up, I’ll do useful work for all children.”

– Nyamdalai Batjargal, pupil at Shavi complex school, Ulaanbaatar City, Mongolia





Montenegro

Pedagogical Center of Montenegro

The Pedagogical Center of Montenegro is a non-governmental organization established in November 2000.

Its mission is to promote the creation of a democratic society through the establishment of a democratic educational system. The Pedagogical Center serves as a catalyst for educational reform by introducing the latest developments in teaching, educational programs, and reference literature and facilitating their adoption, adaptation, and implementation.

The center implements the Step by Step Program through teacher training, the introduction of child-centered educational practices in preschool and primary school classrooms, inclusive education, and programs for Roma children. The center also implements the Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking program and offers ongoing professional training for principals and school administrators as part of the Creating Democratic Schools initiative.

The Pedagogical Center cooperates with the Ministry of Education and Science of Montenegro and provides expert help for educational reform in Montenegro. All experts working with the Pedagogical Center of Montenegro are members of the Expert Commissions for Education Reform. In addition, the reform document, "The Book of Changes of the Education System in Montenegro," incorporates all of the major policies and key principles of the Step by Step Program.

The Step by Step Program in Montenegro started at the preschool level in September 1994, at the primary school level in 2000, and has since added initiatives in inclusive education for children with special needs (2001) and equal education for Roma children (2001). The program goal is to create a new child-centered teaching process tailored to the mental and physical abilities of each child. The program trains teachers and provides new teaching materials and equipment.

In Montenegro the Step by Step Program is being used in 332 kindergarten classrooms and 215 primary school classrooms. In addition, 12 kindergarten and primary classrooms participate in the Roma education initiative, and 21 kindergarten and primary classrooms participate in the initiative for inclusive education for children with special needs.

Partners:

- *Save the Children Fund UK—Inclusive Education Project*
- *Save the Children Fund USA—Refuge Project*
- *Catholic Relief Services—Parent Councils Project*
- *UNICEF—Active Learning Project*
- *British Council—Creating Democratic Schools*
- *World Forum for Early Childhood Education—National representative*
- *International Bureau for Children Rights—National representative*
- *Foundation Open Society Institute Montenegro*
- *International Child Development Initiative (Leiden, the Netherlands) Equal Opportunities Project*

Pedagogical Center of Montenegro

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“In school I like sitting with four at the table. I like the morning meeting and that I always can say what I think.”
— Nikola Vukcevic, Age 10

“Our first ‘step’ was made in kindergartens in Podgorica and Herceg-Novci, in ruined facilities in need of everything. The challenge was great, but many were with us. Our paths of progress have been infinitely long and wide, built on foundations of the most human ‘revolution’ of the Step by Step Program. Today Step by Step has expanded to almost every kindergarten and infant and toddler program in Montenegro. Now it is not a model but a signpost. It makes me happy and proud, because I see that everything we created is growing, making progress and giving fruit.”
— Sofija Klikovac, Principal of the first SbS kindergarten

“In my classroom I like playing and spending time

with friends, and my teacher who is beautiful and funny. I also like how she teaches us.”
— Zorica Ulicevic, Age 9

“The Step by Step Program is great. The thematic planning was very important because we realized that the teacher shouldn’t be a slave to the program, but use it as a means of reaching the aim. The aim, of course, is knowledge—not programmed but functional knowledge, acquired through play, in a way that interests the child. And all that in a pleasant Step by Step classroom environment.”
— Zorica Radovic, Teacher, ES Bosko Buha, Pljevlja

“What I like best is working in the centers—we write, draw, and make books and other interesting things.”
— Stefan Radunovic, Age 7

“Most interesting to me is writing stories and poems and

reading unknown fairy tales and stories of different nations.”
— Dejan Ivanovic, Age 7

“A higher level of communication, openness, and friendship between children and their teacher is part of the Step by Step Program. The child is a person in the full meaning of the word, which is opposite to my time. The child is given more time and his characteristics are watched. By organizing the teaching process through the activity centers, the children are becoming more responsible for their decisions. I am very pleased that my children are enjoying the advantages of the Step by Step Program.”
— Ivanka Fatic Rastoder, Mother of pupils in II & III classes, Vuk Karadzic Podgorica ES

“When I went on holiday I missed my school.”
— Stefan Taci, Age 7



Romania

“Step by Step” Center for Education and Professional Development

The Center for Education and Professional Development (CEDP) is a non-governmental organization that was formed in 1998 to continue operating the Step by Step Program, which began in Romania in 1994. CEDP is a member of the Soros Open Network, committed to the promotion of democratic principles in education and child protection.

CEDP provides teachers, parents, and professionals from the child protection network and educational system access to state-of-the-art training and technical assistance. CEDP specializes in consultancy to local authorities, NGOs, and individuals, offering training, conferences, web-based resources, and creating and promoting specialized magazines.

CEDP aims to:

- Assist and develop the existing training centers.
- Engage local communities in dialogue with the government on their need for high quality infant and toddler care and education services.
- Develop local partnerships in order to ensure local capacity and ownership.
- Initiate, develop, and support partnerships and networking in order to create capacity for financial sustainability.
- Function as a resource center in the field of child protection (focusing on the birth to three age group).
- Function as a resource center for all schools interested in implementing child-centered methodologies for creches, preschool, primary school, lower secondary school, and Pedagogical Institutes by supporting self-sustainable Model Training Centers.

Since its inception, CEDP has provided training in child-centered teaching methods to 25,468 teachers through workshops operated

by a network of 12 model training centers. It has trained 62 faculty members at 22 universities and teacher training institutes. Currently, the program operates in 665 preschool classrooms serving 16,625 children; in 399 primary school classrooms serving 9,975 children; and in 25 creches serving 630 children, including children with disabilities, Roma children, and children from other minority groups. CEDP also focuses on ensuring a smooth transition for children from the child-centered primary grades to the fifth grade.

CEDP holds publication rights for all Step by Step materials in Romania, including 9 methodologies; 259 training modules on different topics such as inclusion of children with disabilities, parenting, and advocacy; 9 higher education courses and curricular materials; 4 standards and assessment tools; and 4 individual assessment books for primary education. All materials were translated and printed in order to support the activities developed throughout the country.

Partners:

Among the local partners with whom CEDP collaborates are the *Ministry of Education and Research*, the *Ministry of Family and Health*, the *National Authority for Child Protection and Adoption*, the *County School Inspectorates*, the *County Child Protection Departments*, *Public Health Departments*, and *City Halls*. Support is also provided by many foreign entities, including *UNICEF*, *USAID*, and *OSI*.



“Step by Step” Center for Education and Professional Development

Contact: Carmen Lica

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Pleading for Happiness

Letter from a mother

Three years ago, with hesitating steps and a strangled voice, my young daughter and I went together, for the first time, on the road to the Kindergarten. I write the word Kindergarten with a capital because it symbolized “our going into society.” All during the summer before I asked myself the same question again and again: Did I choose the right kindergarten for my child? I felt the same anxiety that morning. I looked at Andreea with the intention to encourage her, while she answered me with a cramped smile. Now, after we have gone for three years on this road, I give myself the answer to that obsessing question: Yes, I have chosen the best kindergarten for my child. Everyday I congratulate myself for this choice. Why? Because I find my girl full of joy each afternoon when I pick her up from the kindergarten. Each time she meets me with the same question: “Mami, may I stay here a bit longer? She is sorry that she can’t go to the kindergarten on the weekend. Each evening she tells me with enthusiasm about lots of things she has done during the day. From a shy and introverted child, my little daughter has become a child who knows how to enjoy the

company of her colleagues (she calls all of them friends). The climate in the kindergarten is that of a happy family, with loving moms giving attention to what their children do and know, with many little sisters and brothers. Of course, I tried to go myself into this “fairytland.” How? — reading a story in the literacy center, where the children were all eyes and ears; helping a little girl who could not sharpen her colored pencil; giving advice to the boy who did not know how to model a snowman from clay. And I became a child again when, going on a trip with them, I ran and gathered flowers in the woods; when I saw the curiosity and amazement in the eyes of children during a visit to the school in the town. The activities and topics proposed to the children in the kindergarten were always interesting and various. The celebrations and feasts and shows organized by them were original and surprising in their complexity. In this way my little girl developed so nicely physically and intellectually; in this way I could live together with her the emotions and joyfulness of childhood. The following of this happy story? In the autumn of this year Andreea will be a ducky in the first grade at the School no.5. Where, guess what? There is the same Step by Step Program.

Andreea’s mother
Kindergarten no.3 Step by Step
Tulcea



Russia

All-Russia Foundation for Education Development Soobschestvo (Step by Step Russia)

The Russian Foundation for Education Development Soobschestvo (RFED Soobschestvo) is a non-governmental, not-for-profit organization established in November 1998. The organization was founded to conduct the Step by Step Program. This initiative was supported by federal and regional educational authorities, state universities, and teacher training/retraining institutions, which became the organization founders.

With time, the objectives of RFED Soobschestvo have broadened. In addition to implementation of its major educational program—Step by Step—RFED Soobschestvo actively participates in other state and international educational programs, playing an important role in the Russian non-governmental educational field.

The mission of RFED Soobschestvo is to support the development of educational projects and initiatives that promote modernization of the national educational system. The ultimate goal is to ensure equal access to high quality education for all children—a priority of the Russian Ministry of Education.

The following assets support RFED Soobschestvo in fulfilling its mission: (1) the unique Step by Step methodology; (2) a broad network of educational pre-school and primary institutions who implement the program; (3) an efficient team of professionals offering training and support to teachers and other educators, parents and communities, educational establishments, and policy makers; (4) effective and evolving partnerships with federal and regional-level educational authorities.

RFED Soobschestvo holds a state educational license and operates in St. Petersburg and in a Moscow affiliate and 11 associated NGOs spread across Russia. In 1998 the Ministry of Education awarded the Russian Step by Step pre-school program official status as an “alternative” program.

According to the latest statistical data collected by the organization, the Step by Step Program is being implemented in more than 30 regions of the Russian Federation (90 cities and towns). The program serves more than 1,600 preschool classrooms (25,140 children) and over 300 primary classrooms (9,480 students).

RFED Soobschestvo is one of the National Members of the International Step by Step Association (ISSA). The Foundation holds ISSA's exclusive license on the right to implement the Step by Step Program in the territory of Russia. RFED Soobschestvo and ISSA collaborate on international educational projects and internal Step by Step Programs.



Russian Foundation for Education Development Soobschestvo

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Step by Step — Birth of a Russian Community (Soobschestvo)

1994–2004

Adjusting to democratic values is a long process for both children and adults. During this time we learn to make responsible decisions, initiate change, assess our own achievements, advocate for our rights, and fully appreciate other people's opinions and views.

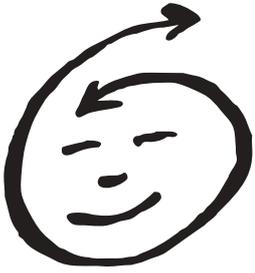
This transformation is unique for every person. Children grow. We grow with them. We are lucky to do this with the Step by Step Program!



Veliky Novgorod • Vladivostok • Nizhny Novgorod • Kazan • Moscow • Novosibirsk • Rodniki • Samara

St. Petersburg • Chelyabinsk • Cheboksary • Yaroslavl • Veliky Novgorod • Vladivostok • Nizhny Novgorod • Kazan • Moscow • Novosibirsk • Rodniki • Samara • St. Petersburg • Chelyabinsk • Cheboksary • Yaroslavl • Veliky Novgorod • Vladivostok • Nizhny Novgorod

• St. Petersburg • Chelyabinsk • Cheboksary • Yaroslavl • Veliky Novgorod • Vladivostok • Nizhny Novgorod •



Serbia

CIP—Center for Interactive Pedagogy

CIP—Center for Interactive Pedagogy is an association of education professionals founded in Belgrade in 1998. CIP's goals are to improve educational practice, promote contemporary interactive teaching methodologies, empower educational institutions and staff, democratize the educational system, and advocate for the inclusion of marginalized groups. CIP's field of operation includes development and implementation of educational programs, project management, seminars, conducting research, and production of publications for children and adults. CIP has been actively involved in educational reform and is now part of policy efforts to improve education for Roma.

The Step by Step Program was the first CIP project, inherited from its predecessor, the Institute of Pedagogy. Preschool Step by Step is being implemented in six preschool institutions, one of which is a training center. There were 16 preschool sites for Roma children, most of which are now housed in official educational institutions. Primary Step by Step is implemented in 14 primary schools. Another very important project is the Serbian REI project, with CIP being the lead implementing partner in this trailblazing initiative for the systematic integration of Roma children and youth into all levels of education.

In 2000 CIP introduced the Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT) program and has trained more than 700 teachers in it. CIP has been developing its own programs as well, the most important being the anti-bias program "Neither Black Nor White."

The CIP—Center for Interactive Pedagogy also publishes preschool and primary Step by Step methodologies and higher education courses, as well as its own training manuals: *Team Work in Education*, *Interactive Teaching Methods*, and *Partnership in Education*.

Partners:

- *Open Society Institute*
- *Fund for an Open Society, Belgrade*
- *International Organizations (CSR, SCF, UNICEF, Concern, GTZ, PCF)*
- *Ministry of Education and Sport*
- *Federal Ministry for Human and Minority Rights*
- *Educational Institutions*
- *Professional Associations and NGOs*
- *National Council of the Roma National Community*



CIP—Center for Interactive Pedagogy

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CIP — CENTER FOR INTERACTIVE PEDAGOGY



WE ARE GOING TO SCHOOL!



CHILDREN INTERACT IN PREPARATION FOR A FASHION SHOW.



WORKING TOGETHER TO BUILD A HOUSE FOR DRAGONS.



CHILDREN AT WORK.





Slovakia

Nadacia Škola dokoran—Wide Open School Foundation

Operating in Slovakia since July 1994, Nadacia Škola dokoran—the Wide Open School Foundation (WOSF)—started its work as the Step by Step Program in cooperation with the Open Society Foundation Slovakia and the Open Society Institute New York. Initially focusing on institutional change in Slovakia's primary education system, WOSF has widened its scope to include special initiatives on inclusion of children with special needs and improvement of Roma minority education systems.

The goal of WOSF's institutional change program is to implement child-centered educational strategies at the local, regional, and national levels. Activities include the establishment of regional education centers; training activities for students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members; tutoring and mentoring activities for beginning teachers; curriculum development on anti-bias, multicultural, community, and cross-curricular approaches; implementation of Step by Step methodology in higher education institutions; and development of schools and community centers. The program is accredited by the Ministry of Education and is being widely implemented throughout the country.

WOSF addresses the education of children and youth with special needs through its inclusion program. The program strives to change public attitudes, adjust the social and learning environment for children with special needs, and develop an appropriate learning atmosphere that meets the individual needs of children. The program promotes the integration of children with disabilities into mainstream classrooms, collaborative relationships with their families, attention to the special needs of each child, and the encouragement of valuing diversity (e.g., ability, cultural, racial, religious, gender) among all children and their families.

WOSF's Roma Minority Education Strategy seeks to improve the educational system currently in place for Roma students, adjusting the program to meet their special needs and provide better opportunities in the future. In order to achieve this goal, WOSF implements a comprehensive program of teacher, administrator, and parent training to address cultural biases and, whenever possible, move Roma children into mainstream classrooms. Roma teaching assistants are also trained and included in classrooms, as a bridge between cultures as well as to provide a positive role model to the Roma students. Through the Roma Community Development program, WOSF facilitates the creation of Roma community centers. These centers provide training programs for children and parents, after school activities, a teen and technology program, a school and jobs program, and a community advisory center.

In Slovakia the Step by Step Program is carried out in 513 preschool classrooms, 211 kindergartens, 298 primary school classrooms, and 10 special schools.



Partners:

- *Nadacia otvorenej spolocnosti - Open Society Foundation Slovakia (OSF)*
- *The Inforoma Foundation*
- *Civil Society Development Foundation (NPOA)*
- *The Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic*

Nadacia Škola dokoran – Wide Open School Foundation

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Nadacia Skola dokoran Wide Open School Foundation

Roma Minority Education Program

School improvement for Roma education - the purpose is to create effective schools and other institutions to prepare Roma students to participate in building a democratic society for the 21st century.



High expectations - The implementation of culturally and developmentally appropriate methodology in the classroom provides the setting for effective cognitive and social development.



Children in the class -
"Step by Step in our class should be every day and at every time."

Community Center Jarovnice –
Early childhood prevention program for children birth to age 6 and parents

"Education of these children takes a comprehensive approach. It cannot be done just through school. It cannot be just by the community. It takes both the school and the community working together." – Roma program coordinator.



Systematic Change in Education

The goal is to implement open society values in the school system through the development of child-centered educational strategies.



Interaction with the parents -
Parents as educators of children:
they assist in the classroom.

"Children deserve to receive our most precious care because they are the most valuable gift and gem that cannot be compared to anything else."

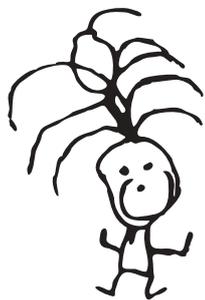
Ján Amos Komensky

Integration of Children with Special Needs

The purpose is to involve the public and experts in the challenge of integrating children and youth with special needs in education and community programs and to initiate the establishment of volunteer community integration centers.



Holistic initiatives for youth -
"Computer is our most popular activity at school."



Slovenia

Developmental Research Center for Educational Initiatives “Step by Step”

The Developmental Research Center for Educational Initiatives “Step by Step” Slovenia was established in order to research, develop, and implement educational reform in public schools in Slovenia. These activities aim to ensure equal opportunities in education for all children and to involve families and community members in the education process. The center’s programs are based on principles of democratic civil society, children’s and parents’ rights, contemporary knowledge of children’s development and learning abilities, and the introduction of change into the education system. The core activities focus on promoting the Step by Step philosophy and implementation of child-centered methodologies for children from birth through ninth grade.

Currently the program serves 3,940 preschool and 3,936 primary school children in 255 preschool classrooms and 164 primary classrooms. Over 600 teachers have been trained in new methods since the program began in 1995.

In 2000 the Center started the Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking project (RWCT) in cooperation with the International Reading Association and Open Society Institute (NY), in order to expand services and to provide a transition from primary school to secondary school for children who have participated in Step by Step programs.

Other significant accomplishments of the Center include:

- Participation in the expert commission for preparing the national preschool curriculum and national policy paper on integration of Roma in regular education.
- Formal accreditation of the Center’s training sessions for professional development credit.
- Establishment of partnerships with all pedagogical facilities to allow students to complete their student practice in Step by Step model centers.

- Provision of training and assistance to support the inclusion of refugee children, Roma children, and children with disabilities into preschool and primary classrooms.
- Implementation of studies on the impact of Step by Step initiatives.
- Publication of training manuals and educational materials for teachers, including some developed by the Center.

Partners:

- *The Ministry of Work, Family and Social Matters and the Ministry of Education*
- *The Association Sožitje (Cohabitation)*
- *The Counseling Center for Children, Adolescents and Parents*
- *Center for Permanent Professional Education at the National Education Institute*
- *Educational Research Institute*
- *Pedagogical Faculty of Ljubljana, Koper and Maribor*
- *Peace Institute*
- *Ombudsman Office*
- *Institute for Minorities*
- *Regional Education Centers*
- *Roma Associations*



Developmental Research Center for Educational Initiatives “Step by Step”

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Until Step by Step, direct inclusion of relatives into the life of a class was not common. Now, the teachers initiate and support family involvement.

Our family was among the first that joined the Step by Step Program in Slovenia, and each of us entered the project in his/her own, special way.

As a six-year-old, our son, Drejc, joined a class of preschool children and experienced the changes directly.

I remember how scared I was the first day of the school, but my fear was completely unnecessary. Our classroom was completely different from the others. I think that the activity centers helped us to learn so much because we could decide on our own what we wanted to do. Everyone told us that we were just playing. We really did play, but we learned a lot by playing. The proof is in our high academic outcomes—we were the children with the highest academic achievement.

— Drejc Simnic, Age 15, July, 2004

Our daughter Ajda was in primary school when Drejc began preschool. She volunteered in the class; for example, at playtime in the table games nook, she was in charge of recognizing and following the rules of a game.



Drejc's father became an active classroom volunteer. An electronic engineer, he skillfully and with pleasure carried over his joinery experience to the children. He was indispensable at assembling equipment and repairing toys.

Drejc with his father Drago, a volunteer in the classroom



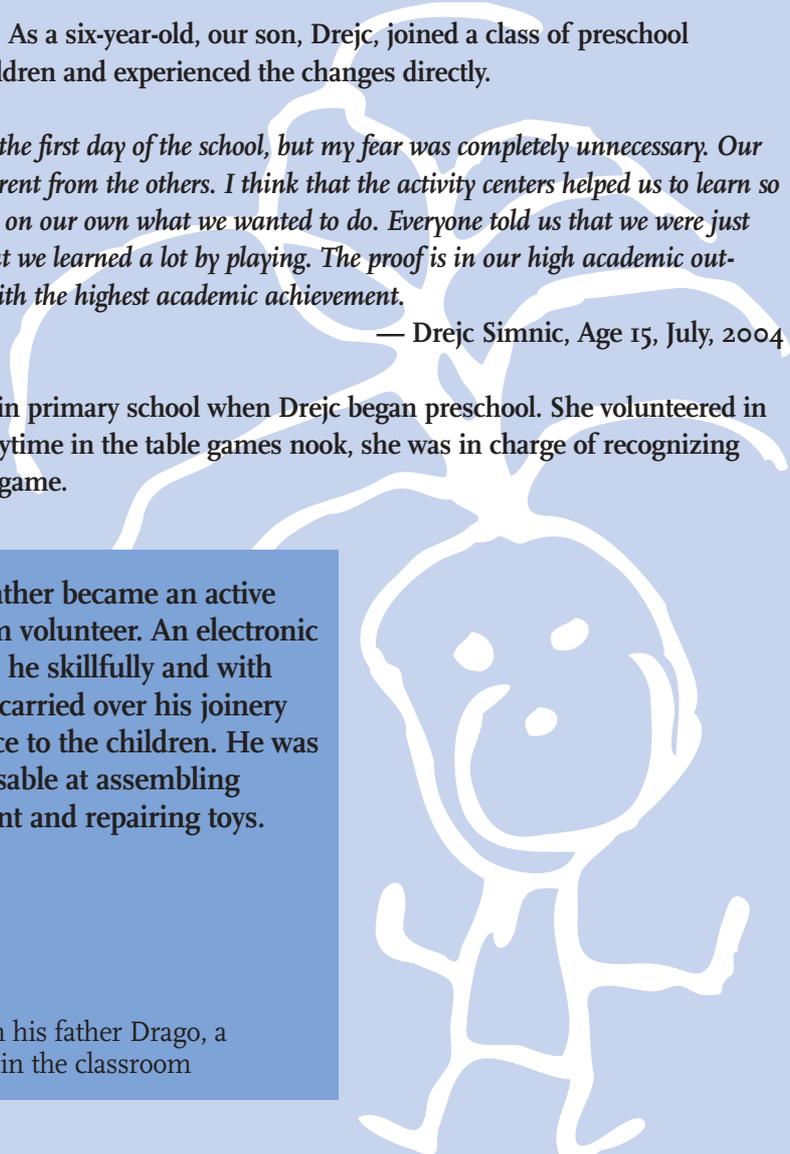
As a mother and as manager of this program in our preschool, I observed the Step by Step methodology from two perspectives.

After two years I noticed that Drejc developed from a shy boy into an extremely independent and self-confident youngster with a strong backbone.

As a professional I gained a great deal of experience, knowledge, and new acquaintances as never before.

The memories are unforgettable, eternal.

Mother and Master Teacher Trainer
— Andreja Jaklic Simnic





Tajikistan

OSI Assistance Foundation Tajikistan

Step by Step began in Tajikistan in 2002 with financial support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Open Society Institute (OSI). Since its inception, the program has held training workshops and seminars for policymakers and practitioners in the fields of preschool and primary education and has gained official support from the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Tajikistan. The project team has also developed a relationship with the Center for Educational Initiatives, “Shag za Shagom,” in Kyrgyzstan. Step by Step in Tajikistan draws on the substantial experience of mentors from Kyrgyzstan to guide the program through its infancy.

In 2003 the Step by Step Program became a participant in USAID’s Participation, Education, and Knowledge Strengthening project. This project has provided support for the expansion of Step by Step and cooperation with other technical assistance providers in the fields of education and community mobilization.

Step by Step in Tajikistan works through the OSI Assistance Foundation to support innovative ideas and changes that help to democratize education and acknowledge the rights of children and their families. The program seeks to involve parents in their children’s education in order to improve the quality and availability of primary education for all. The four main goals of Step by Step in Tajikistan are:

- Increased parental involvement in preschool and primary education;
- Introduction of child-centered education through community support;
- Implementation of child-centered preschool programs in at least five regions of the country that are not served through the existing state preschool programs; and
- Provision of training in child-centered methods and other innovations for teachers and administrators through pre-service and in-service courses.

The Step by Step Program currently includes 40 classrooms serving 1,200 children (age 3-5). Six universities, colleges, and pedagogical institutions participate in the program.

Partners:

- *Open Society Institute*
- *United States Agency for International Development*
- *Academy for Educational Development (AED)*
- *Save the Children UK*
- *Save the Children US*



OSI Assistance Foundation Tajikistan

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According to the Step by Step Program staff, it was obvious that there were a lot of changes in the system at schools. One very simple example is that usually directors announce vacation because of cold weather for the primary grades, but last winter they continued lessons in the Step by Step classrooms just because children did not want to go to vacation. Children were given better conditions in order to continue their study.

“Working with parents and their involvement is one of the key aspects of the program. We do not say that parents were not involved in the past, but their participation consisted of judging whether the teachers of their children did right or wrong. Here in Step by Step the parents’ role is as facilitator, and they are involved even in the planning process.”

—Akhmedov Akram, Director of School #9, Khujand City, Sogd oblast



Many teachers from schools and preschools have not had access to state-sponsored professional development courses since the collapse of the former Soviet Union. “We have never been given this kind of opportunity to feel ourselves as students, which is the most exciting one for every teacher,” said a participant of the training.

It is very exciting for teachers to have the opportunity to learn using the Step by Step active learning approach.

Our discussions and informal conversations during training give us the confidence that we are on the right path to implement the program. We want a bright future for our children and society as a whole. This is such a wonderful program and it is a pity our previous students did not have it in their time.





Ukraine

Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation

The Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation (USSF) is a non-governmental, nonprofit membership organization whose aim is to promote democratic reforms to ensure equal access to high-quality education for all children, especially children with special needs, children of national minorities, children from socially unprotected families, or homeless children. Established in 1999, USSF grew out of the Step by Step Program, which was launched in 1994 with the support of the Open Society Institute (New York, USA) and the International Renaissance Foundation (Kyiv, Ukraine). Underlying the USSF programs are the principles of democratic and civil societies and an appreciation of the fundamental needs of all children and families. USSF programs support the development of community-based education with active parent and community involvement in the educational process.

USSF's initiatives include:

- Teacher training for preschool, primary and secondary school teachers, school administrators, university teachers, and parents and ongoing in-depth consultancy.
- Programs to promote inclusion of children with special needs in regular classrooms and to develop public awareness around issues of integration of these children into Ukrainian society. USSF conducts round-table discussions, develops films, and publishes materials on children with special needs.
- An Education for Minorities program, which operates in the regions where the percentage of national diversity is the highest. Program activities include teacher training, parent involvement, and the development of educational materials.
- A Child Abuse program, which operates in 11 schools in the Ukraine. A manual for teachers and parents, "Child Under the Umbrella of Law," was published and includes materials about the extent of the problem, kinds of abuse, characteristics of the children who suffered from abuse, and legal documents. A study on Children's Rights was implemented in 2001.
- A publishing program that includes publication of the professional journal *Steps to Democratic Education*.

- A Community School Development program to implement community programs in schools, based on a community needs assessment and involvement of community members in the decision-making process. The program was launched with support from the Charles Mott Foundation and International Renaissance Foundation.

Partners:

- *EveryChild Organization (UK)*
- *Associazione Amici dei Bambini (Italy)*
- *Ukrainian Social Investment Fund (Kyiv, Ukraine)*
- *Krasnoyarsk Regional Center "Cooperation on the Local Level" (Krasnoyarsk, Russia)*
- *Kyiv Oblast Advisory Agrarian Services (Kyiv, Ukraine)*
- *Agency of Regional Development "Donbass" (Donetsk, Ukraine)*
- *Center "Pershi Kroky" (Lviv, Ukraine)*
- *Project "Strengthening the Partnership between Schools and Communities" of Institute of Sustainable Communities (USA)*
- *Child and Environment Organization (Kyiv, Ukraine)*



Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation

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Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in the Ukraine

Facts & Figures

- 27 schools are involved in the program “Inclusion of Children with Special Needs;”
- 146 children with special needs are included into the regular preschool and primary classrooms;
- 393 preschool and primary teachers are trained to work in the inclusive classrooms;
- 7 Training Centers in the cities Kyiv, Lviv, Poltava, Butcha, Bila Tserkva, Khmelnytsk, and Ivano-Frankivsk provide training and consultation on inclusive educational practices;
- 64 parents of children with special needs have been trained in Lobbying and Advocacy Practices; 6 regular schools have been physically adapted to accept children in wheelchairs;
- A database of more than 45 non-governmental organizations that advocate for the rights of children with special needs has been created.

Program Initiatives

In partnership with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and the Institute of Special Pedagogy, USSF has developed programs for the inclusion of children with special needs into 27 regular schools in Ukraine.

Projects include:

- Creating centers of excellence for inclusive education of children with special needs in mainstream schools (supported by TACIS).
- Family Action for Inclusion in Education (supported by MATRA program of the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Ukraine).
- Realization of the Human Rights for Equal Access to Quality Education (supported by the Human Rights Fund of the Embassy of Great Britain).



“I like to go to school very much, and I am very sad if I can’t attend school for some reason. Most of all I like reading and drawing.”
—Natalya

“Natalya is the most courteous in our classroom. She doesn’t hurt anybody in our classroom. She has many friends, she is nice, and she draws very well. I like to play with Natalya and make her laugh – she laughs very nicely. When she is sad, I like to make her laugh.”
—Taras, Natalya’s friend



“We think Maliuk is the best place for Natalya. She attends the school together with her peers. She can communicate with her friends and participate in all activities. She has a lot of friends!”
—Natalya’s parents

“I like to have Lesyk in our classroom. He is very kind.”
—Vasylyna, Lesyk’s friend

“Lesyk is very merry. I like to help him study.”
—Lilya, Lesyk’s friend

“Lesyk has learnt a lot with us — he was very well and he speaks more words.”
—Andriy, Lesyk’s friend

“I like Julia because she plays with me and is in our classroom.”
—Vitya, Julia’s friend

“When Julia is in the classroom, it is more quiet. She has headache when it is noisy.”
—Dzvinka, Julia’s friend

“Julia shows the example of kindness. We all have to be like her. The energy and kindness go from Julia to all of us.”
—Nastya, Julia’s friend

“Julia is very courteous.”
—Mychailyk, Julia’s friend

Victor Ogneviuk

Vice-Minister of Education

“It is absolutely wrong when we create specialized boarding schools or other institutions for these children, preventing them from seeing life in all of its complexity.”

Vyatcheslav Zasenکو

Vice director of the Institute of the Special Pedagogy

“It is important to develop public opinion with adequate awareness of the issue since collision of polar points of view is quite commonplace.”

Mykola Swarnyk

President of Parents’ Association Nadiya, member of the Board of the Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation

“Again we see in our child her uniqueness. We see her purpose – to be our child, purely to bring out and receive our love.”

Oksana Vynar

Teacher

“Now I am deeply convinced that only when working directly with a specific child and not through his/her diagnosis, can any conclusions be drawn as to his/her chances of studying in the general education school.”

Publications & Research

Publications by the program include:

- *Steps to Integration of Children with Special Needs into Society*
- *Children with Special Needs in the Comprehensive Education: Primary School*

Research on the impact of the inclusive educational model has been conducted.

Uzbekistan

Step by Step in Uzbekistan

The Step by Step Program began reaching classrooms in Uzbekistan in 2003. In Uzbekistan the Step by Step Program is jointly funded by the United States Agency for International Development and the Open Society Institute as part of the Participation, Education, and Knowledge Strengthening (PEAKS) project, which works with its partners—the Academy for Educational Development, Save the Children, Abt Associates, and local NGOs (Foundation for Education Support Alfa and Omega, Tashkent Center for Modern Information/Pedagogical Technologies, and Ziyu)—to help engage schools and teachers in child-centered educational methodologies. In 2003, teachers in eight preschools and ten primary schools received training and began using Step by Step methodologies in their classrooms. In 2004 this number increased to 18 preschools and 17 primary schools, training 52 primary grade teachers and 60 preschool teachers who are now improving the learning environments for over 2,800 children. Step by Step has supplemented the existing classroom facilities with low-cost, child-friendly furniture and educational materials that promote active learning. In addition, Step by Step trainers have worked with schools on creating learning materials from locally available, no-cost materials.

At present, within the PEAKS project, Step by Step has chosen nine of the most promising new schools to become professional development schools, which will model good practices and quality teaching to surrounding schools. These model centers are located in six oblasts of Uzbekistan: Tashkent, Khorezm, Bukhara, Fergana, Karakalpakstan and Tashkent City. These sites were strategically chosen in an open competition and each center is linked to a regional in-service teacher-retraining institute. The program has already begun training higher education faculty in pedagogical colleges and universities. In total, there were seven training sessions conducted where over 250 educators from different levels, starting from preschool up to the universities and Ministry of Public Education, have been taught new pedagogical technologies. Step by Step staff provides regular mentoring to teachers. In coming years, Step by Step will expand into additional schools and will focus on developing a high level of quality in existing schools, based on the ISSA teacher standards.



Step by Step—Uzbekistan

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100 Days in Step by Step

Hello! My name is Munissa. I am in 1st grade at Akkurgan school #6. Our town is small and is located in a rural area. We are very lucky to have the Step by Step Program. This program is new to Uzbekistan, and our school is one of the first to participate. Recently we had a “100 Days in Step by Step” celebration.



We decorated the scene beautifully by hanging 100 balloons with the help of parents. We made a presentation about the Step by Step Program. Then we performed songs, poems, Uzbek Folk dances, and dances of different peoples of the World...

The Deputy Mayor of our town congratulated us and awarded every pupil a certificate with inscriptions of the topics we had learned during the past 100 days.



We indeed learned a lot—not only to read and write like all first graders, but also to make handmade books, locate our country on the map, identify what’s in a box based on the sound, measure with a ruler, make observations through a microscope, draw without a paintbrush, look after a tortoise that lives in our classroom, and many other things.



Our mothers baked a big cake and lit 100 candles on it. They are happy for us because, when our brothers and sisters were at school, they didn’t have so much fun, and our parents didn’t take part in their classes. Now our parents often come to the class and work with us in activity centers. On Teachers’ Day I will not only congratulate our teacher, but also my mom and my granny, since they are our teachers as well.

A merry dance with our teacher Dilfuza Abdieva closed the event. When I am grown up, I am going to become a teacher in the Step by Step Program.



ISSA Membership Information

ISSA offers several levels of membership and welcomes applications for membership from individuals and organizations that promote child-centered, community-based approaches to early childhood care and education.

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Educating Children for Democracy is the professional journal of the International Step by Step Association. It is intended for teachers of children from birth through age ten, faculty who instruct preschool and/or primary school teachers, and other educational professionals interested in child-centered teaching methods.

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The International Step by Step Association is committed to having a journal that is written for and by teachers, parents, faculty in institutions of higher education, and other interested educational professionals serving children from birth through age ten.

