



EDUCATION SUPPORT PROGRAM

Education Cooperation *across the* Caucasus



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Education Cooperation across the Caucasus

EDUCATION COOPERATION ACROSS THE CAUCASUS

Throughout 2009 a coalition of educators from across the Caucasus will work together to raise awareness among national and international policymakers of the education and social policy challenges surrounding vulnerable children and young people in the region. Their unprecedented collaboration will also support the growth of innovative, locally-conceived models that promote the integration of minority, disadvantaged and excluded children and young people to mitigate the effects of long-term and ongoing conflicts and divisions.

In 2007 the Open Society Institute's (OSI) Education Support Program (ESP) launched the initiative *Education Cooperation across the Caucasus* as a partnership with the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Culture and the Arts through the Interkulturelles Zentrum, national Soros Foundations in the South Caucasus, and civil society partners in the North and South Caucasus. The initiative will raise awareness of the challenges and injustices facing vulnerable children throughout the Caucasus as well as promoting regional collaboration, both as a means to improve donor and national policy responses to excluded and disadvantaged children and as an end in itself. Through such collaboration, this initiative hopes to demonstrate sustainable solutions in the work of its partners and to lay the groundwork for effective policies to bring about stability in the region and by encouraging civil society to cooperate across borders in the interest of children.



The Caucasus has been a center of exchange and confrontation since the days of the Russian Empire: today, over fifty ethnic groups with distinct languages, histories and customs inhabit the region. Events since 1991 have led to social dislocation with decidedly negative consequences for the region's children in social, economic and educational terms.

To illustrate the scale of the issue, an estimated 250,000 children in the region live as refugees, mainly in Azerbaijan and Georgia; approximately 37.5% of all children in Ingushetia are internally displaced. In Chechnya, 19,435 children need some kind of medical rehabilitation as a result of conflict and between 1994 and 2000 as many as 200,000 children suffered long-term disruptions in their schooling.

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that education provision for all age groups has suffered. Preschool attendance, a strong predictor of future success in school, remains of particular concern in most of the Caucasus republics, with very low overall attendance and little or no data on internally displaced children. Children with

disabilities have sporadic access to education. For example, in Chechnya as few as 22% of children with disabilities have any access to formal schooling. As a result of instability across the region, children often have serious gaps in their learning and skills that follow them into adulthood. Such children often have difficulty integrating, leading to further exclusion both in the classroom and in wider society.

All these factors clearly inhibit the growth of a strong, sustained, inclusive and responsive education system, and the global financial crisis is likely to exacerbate this. Civil society organizations in the region warn that the growing numbers of under- or uneducated and vulnerable children contributes in turn to increasing levels of poverty, decreasing social cohesion and further declines in socio-economic development. Such a situation clearly poses a threat to the immediate and long-term prospects of building free, open societies in the region.

However, the very fact that these problems are so widespread demonstrates the common ground that actors in the region are beginning

to discover. Education Cooperation across the Caucasus was launched to create opportunities for education professionals to better address their common challenges by working together to improve access to education for vulnerable and marginalized children; numerous small projects, local, regional and cross-cultural, are already working toward this objective. Targeted regions include the North Caucasus Republics of Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. ESP has funded twelve projects that focus on the specific priorities identified by governments and civil society organizations in each country and which, with support from the international community, could be replicated or scaled up by local and national governments.

Descriptions of the 12 projects appear on the following pages.



Supported Schooling and Re-entry into the Education System

Elimination of Illiteracy in Mountain Rural Areas

Creation NGO, Gudermes, Chechen Republic

Creation pilots a second chance education program for 40 children aged 12–19 from two villages who have dropped out of school and are unable to read or write. This educational program includes work with parents to encourage children to return to the education system and the teaching of skills (basic literacy, math and Russian language) that are essential for children to complete secondary school. In addition, **Creation** will offer children art therapy to help them deal with the psychological trauma of years of conflict in Chechnya. The experience of this initiative is intended as a positive and effective model of work with vulnerable children and their parents in war-affected areas.

SUPPORTED SCHOOLING AND RE-ENTRY INTO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM



Second Chance Opportunities

Civic Development Institute, Georgia

www.cdi.org.ge

The **Civic Development Institute (CDI)** works on a national model of second chance educational opportunities for young people at risk by developing a flexible curriculum framework that allows them to complete primary school requirements with their peers as well as providing vocational skills so that they can be successful in the job market. **CDI** also plans an advocacy campaign focused on an analysis of the costs of returning a child to school versus losing a child to the streets. Specifically, project activities target 90 disadvantaged children from the Social Adaptation Center, the Momavlis Saxli orphanage and vulnerable young people from the surrounding community.

SUPPORTED SCHOOLING AND RE-ENTRY INTO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM



Youth and their Future Life

Society Biliki, Georgia

www.biliki.ge

Society Biliki seeks to help every child reach his or her full potential in their families and communities. The project supports the integration of 60 street children and 70 young people from the surrounding community into the education system through formal and non-formal education methods. This includes intensive work with parents/caregivers, teachers and community representatives to equip them with the appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes to work effectively with these children. Located in the Shida Kartli district (which includes the conflict zone of South Ossetia and thus suffers from high unemployment, poverty, and large populations of IDPs), **Society Biliki** remains the only NGO in the district that offers formal and non-formal education, psychological, social, and medical support to vulnerable children. The strategies and curriculum developed through this project could be adapted by other civil society organizations to address similar problems in other areas.



Inter-regional Exchange

Inter-regional Camp for Children from the North Caucasus

**Institute of Pedagogy and Psychology of
Development NGO, Krasnoyarsk, Russia**

The **Institute's** project will bring together 70 high school students over two years through an inter-regional summer camp where they will learn skills that support tolerance, conflict resolution, effective communication, and critical thinking. This initiative provides an important precedent of cross border collaboration among the republics in the North Caucasus in a region where exchange is rare, contributing to greater tolerance and better understanding of other cultures among the children who participate, and providing a replicable model for other groups. Cooperation of students from different republics will contribute to building connections and eliminating prejudices and stereotypes towards neighbors.

INTER-REGIONAL EXCHANGE



Cross-cultural Understanding and Peace in North Caucasus

Intercenter, Russia

The project is being implemented in partnership with the Institute of Pedagogy and Psychology of Development from Krasnoyarsk, and aims to consolidate the experience of the British Council in the areas of cross-cultural school ethos, prevention of violence and bullying in schools. The project will increase the number of schools with a tolerant multicultural ethos in North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Ingushetia, then transferring this expertise into schools in Dagestan, Adygea, and Karachaevo-Cherkessia. The series of training initiatives for schools will build local capacity, laying the foundation for the in-service program in the region, and will work with schools to develop school plans to introduce multicultural policies, including the introduction of anti-bullying policies to support migrant children and other vulnerable groups, setting up school ombudsman governing boards and providing extra curricular activities for children in need of life skills. The project will also provide opportunities for children from different ethnic backgrounds to meet and participate in joint training to plan specific actions to be implemented in their schools. These actions will aim at reaching migrant children and their families.



Internally Displaced Children

Assistance

Civil Initiative, North Ossetia

The number of school-age children in North Ossetia who are internally displaced due to conflict could be as high as 11,700 to 16,800. These children often have difficulty in school due to interrupted education and emotional trauma. As a result, they are frequently marginalized in the classroom because of poor academic performance, truancy and anti-social behavior. **Civil Initiative** provides professional development workshops for teachers and parents as well as extracurricular activities for eighty children focusing on reading, math, Russian language and computer skills, thus supporting giving all groups in developing the capacity to work together successfully in the classroom.

INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN



IDP Schools as Efficient, Effective and Active Members of the Society

**Center for Innovations in Education (CIE),
Azerbaijan**

www.cie.az

The **Center for Innovations in Education** is a spin-off organization of the Education Support Program of the Open Society Institute –Assistance Foundation/Azerbaijan. It seeks to assist educators, institutions, policy-makers, advocacy groups, researchers and civil society in improving the quality and efficiency of the education system. Their project within this initiative pilots a model of social inclusion that connects seven schools for internally displaced children in the Gubadly district of Nagorno Karabakh to mainstream schools. It aims to strengthen the capacity of all secondary schools involved and substantially decrease the isolation of internally displaced children studying in segregated schools. Approximately 30 teachers and 200 students will benefit from this pilot project, which aims to break down stereotypes about Internally Displaced People (IDPs) and to provide a framework for segregated IDP schools to begin integrating their students into mainstream education.

INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN



Initiative for Providing High Quality Educational Opportunities for Young IDPs

«Umid-98» Humanitarian and Social Support Center, Azerbaijan

www.umid-hsdm.com

Umid-98 seeks to foster solutions to the social, economic and education problems of vulnerable youth by returning internally displaced children who have left school to education. Interest in education among these children is reinforced through extracurricular activities that include training and hands-on internships with local businesses, rational organization of their leisure time, delivering vocational apprenticeship and business training and career counseling, and promoting parental involvement in the process of returning children to school through parents' education and inclusion in youth activities provided within the framework of the project. Specifically, the target groups of the project are children and teachers from three rural secondary schools in the Zobujug settlements of Fizuli district. This project seeks to provide a national program model on more qualitative education opportunities for IDP children.

INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN



Student Development Committees

Educational Center for Youth, Azerbaijan

www.ecy-az.org

The **Education Center for Youth (ECY)** in Azerbaijan focuses on strengthening students' interest in education by increasing their involvement in school activities. This project supports the creation of Student Development Committees by internally displaced children aged 13–17 from 11 schools in the Qayidish settlement of Fizuli district. The long-term goal of the project is to improve and reinforce educational opportunities of schoolchildren. As a result of participation in school governance, various interest clubs for improving educational opportunities, creative activities, trainings, intellectual contests, etc., while learning the skills necessary for active citizenship, students will develop a greater sense of their belonging to the school community and will be better inspired to become active members of civil society. **ECY** estimates that up to 1,000 schoolchildren could benefit from project activities and hopes that project results will inspire similar practices elsewhere in the region.



Children with Disabilities and or Special Educational Needs

From Capacity Building towards Better Inclusion of Children with Disabilities

Bridge of Hope, Armenia

www.bridgeofhope.am

Bridge of Hope works to protect the rights of children and young people with special educational needs. This is achieved both through advocating for the implementation of Armenia's existing inclusive education policies, and working with schools to find concrete approaches for including all children in their communities, including the development of organizational standards for inclusive schools that could become a blueprint for national policy. Within the framework of this project, **Bridge of Hope** is supporting teachers in 31 schools across Armenia to include children with special educational needs through improved classroom practices and community engagement based on the social model of disability.

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND OR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS



Beryllus

Beryllus, Georgia

www.beryllus.ge

Beryllus provides extracurricular opportunities for 80 disabled or disadvantaged 11–16 year-olds in order to equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to find employment in the future. The segregated educational institutions where these children study are not able to provide adequate education, and as a result many find themselves on the streets, in juvenile detention centers, or trafficked to other countries as laborers or sex workers. **Beryllus** hopes to reverse these trends by equipping young people with specific professional skills, developing their sense of dignity, and countering negative stereotypes of these children. The project also supports young people through job placements and has already secured a job offer for one of the children studying photography. We hope that this project will serve as a powerful inspiration for the rest of the region.

Expansion of Educational Opportunities for At-risk Children through Raising Teachers' Pedagogical Competence

Friendship – Kislovodsk, Russia

Many teachers in the North Caucasus are poorly prepared to support children who have experienced open conflict and violence in their communities. **Friendship** provides training for twenty teachers and psychologists from Chechnya, North Ossetia and Dagestan in order to improve their skills in working with these children. After a series of intensive training workshops, teachers share their newly acquired knowledge with approximately 500 of their colleagues. In addition to improving outcomes for the students in project schools, **Friendship** believes that the model of in-service teacher training developed through the project could be scaled up in the North Caucasus. The project will also produce an important manual for teachers to guide them through similar professional development.

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