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Reflections on changes in legislation and national policy frameworks: ECCE in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Romania and Ukraine

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Reflections on Changes in Legislation and National Policy Frameworks: ECCE in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Romania and Ukraine

This short comparative study considers key developments and challenges in early childhood care and education (ECCE) in the CIS and its neighbours through a closer look at four countries: Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, and Romania. The countries were selected for the regional windows they open on to this large vista; one that is remarkable as much for its similarities as it is for its sharp differences. The brief study traces the decline in ECCE services and provision since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 and its halting, yet hopeful, recovery in the last few years; contrasting similarities and differences, it lays out priorities in policy and provision for ECCE in the wider region.

As different culturally and historically as these four countries are, what they shared as partner states in the former communist bloc in relation to early childhood care and education were both the assumption of the centralized provision of services and a pedagogical ideology determined by the state. As this paper points out, this never actually meant equal access to quality services, only the pretence of it, nevertheless what existed then was far broader and more equitable than any of the countries in this region have been able subsequently to achieve. The four countries were selected as cases not for their capacity to represent the vast geographical region that shared a brief historical conjuncture during the soviet period; they do not. Rather, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Romania and Ukraine were selected for this study because of the insights they offer into major sub-regions of the former soviet space. Armenia draws attention to the travails and complexities of the South Caucasus; Kyrgyzstan allows a consideration of ECCE in the primarily rural and still significantly nomadic Central Asia; Romania reflects the hopes and frustrations of the scramble for European accession; and Ukraine holds a mirror that reflects both Russia and its European aspirations.¹

This paper is structured both in terms of chronology and the attendant changes in ECCE policy and provision. The first part looks briefly at the Soviet model of ECCE, pointing to both the strengths and weaknesses of the system. The second part of the

paper explores the changes to ECCE that accompanied the shift to market economies. The two most important effects of the transition process for ECCE were the diminishing of budgetary support for essential services such as health, education and social welfare, and the loss of the centralised provision of ECCE services. The third part explores the recent changes in legislation and national policy frameworks over the last few years – changes that reveal amongst other things a shift towards an emphasis on greater co-ordination of ECCE supply, increased regulation and greater financial support. In light of the preceding analysis the final section offers specific recommendations.

1. Pre-Transition Soviet ECCE model

Despite the wide range of the countries addressed in this paper in terms of regions, religions, states of economic development etc., Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Romania and Ukraine also have much in common with regards to ECCE. All four countries have made the difficult and painful transition from the ECCE Soviet model; a model characterised by an extensive network of preschool institutions. Preschool facilities were prolific, well-equipped and adequately financed. Through nurseries, kindergartens, and departmental institutions, which served the children of an organisation's employees, the Soviet system provided coverage for most children aged 4 to 7 years old. Comprehensive care for preschool children facilitated the state policy of allowing women to become active participants in the labour force. Kindergartens also generated significant employment in the state sector, with some kindergartens employing up to 50 personnel catering for 200 children. As state bodies for social education, the principal goal of preschool education under this system was to provide "communist teaching". Thus, the State provided detailed pedagogical material that focused on the physical, mental and moral development of the child which privileged the centrality of the State and the collective in the process of socialising children. Furthermore, the integrated nature of the system of education meant that a close and interdependent relationship between kindergartens and schools was well established. The Soviet system of preschool education, however, did have its shortcomings. As women were encouraged to take care of their very young children themselves, there were a limited number of nurseries. Coverage rate in Romania was

¹ Due to the paucity of available information with regards to ECCE in Kyrgyzstan the case for this country is less developed than the other cases.

only about 5% for 0-3 year olds.² Nurseries were principally of a custodial nature providing nutrition and health care with little or no educational programme.³ Aigli Zafeirakou also points out that in SEE not only were rural areas lacking in facilities but also the poorest children often had poor nutrition (2006). Significantly, as ECCE services were targeted at the employed by the state, these services excluded those outside the state sector.

2. ECCE during the 1990s: Budgetary Constraints and Decentralisation

During the shift from the command economy of the Soviet system to liberal market economies, the early transition phase in all four countries was characterised mainly by fiscal crises, political turmoil, rising unemployment, substantial drops in fertility rates, greater social and economic insecurity and most importantly for the provision of ECCE, the collapse or partial collapse of social services due to diminished state allocation for health, welfare and education. Differences in the nature and severity of the external and internal shocks experienced by the different countries result in divergences in the coverage and quality of services available for young children in these countries. In terms of employment, on the one hand, in the countries of SEE, the 1999 figures register a drop in employment of more than 25% compared with 1989. On the other hand, the post-Soviet republics' rate of employment dropped the least compared with other former Soviet countries. The less overt employment masks the much lower real wages and the dramatic drop in GDP of the post Soviet republics. By 1999, Ukraine registered a drop of 62.2 percentage points of its GDP.⁴ Before Independence, Ukraine in addition to having a diversified heavy industry generated almost a quarter of Soviet agricultural output, providing substantial amounts of agricultural products to other Soviet republics. Liberal economic policies, a privatization framework, and resistance to reforms have resulted in the dramatic drop in GDP. However, the agricultural and heavy industrial basis of its economy has meant that the early transition phase is exemplified by less overt unemployment. The pre-transition industry of Armenia, on the other hand, relied mostly on the import of material goods with industrial production relying on capital and skilled labour. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, its external markets were closed and the transition

² Rostgaard, Tine. "Family Support Policy in Central and Eastern Europe – A Decade and a Half of Transition." The Danish National Institute of Social Research, Copenhagen. p. 21

³ The World Bank, 2005. "Growth, Poverty and Inequality in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union." ECA, The World Bank.

period, as in Kyrgyzstan and Romania, was typified by mass unemployment with its concomitants of rising poverty, worsening of living conditions and increasing social and economic insecurity. An evaluation of social and political contexts for ECCE must not only take into account general and regional trends but must also take cognisance of elements particular to a country. For instance, there are other shocks that are specific to Armenia that have kept the country in a state of crisis: the devastating earthquake in Northern Armenia, the energy crisis, which resulted from the closure of the Armenian nuclear power plant and the reduction of fuel imports, the political crisis in 1992 with the Nagorno Karabakh region, and the Russian financial crisis in 1998.

In the first decade of transition the socio-economic climate was to have an alarming effect on the fertility rates of Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Romania and Ukraine. Rostgaard points out that, presently, post-communist countries are recording the lowest fertility in the world (2004). The population of Ukraine dropped from 51.5 million in 1989 to 49.1 million in 2001 with a birth rate of 1.09 live births per woman which is the lowest among the post-communist countries (see Rostgaard).⁵ Romania also registered a drop by almost 40% during the early transition phase, while Armenia saw just over a 60% decrease in birth-rate during the period 1990-1996.⁶ Table 2 indicates that in all four countries the rate of decrease slows down for the period 2001-2005 (see appendix). This decrease corresponds with an increase in GDP per capita in each of the countries, suggesting a renewal of confidence in economic stability (see Table 1 in appendix).

2.1. Collapse of Budgetary Support for ECCE

In all four countries, the collapse of the formal economy, the attendant socio-economic crisis and the move to market economies had two major consequences for ECCE. The first was disastrous and the second came as somewhat of a mixed blessing. Firstly, the social, economic and political climates of the countries under discussion resulted in a sharp decrease in state allocations for social services. Armenia registers a steady decrease in public education expenditure as a percentage of GDP. It decreased

⁴ Rostgaard p.10

⁵ A birth rate of 2.1 is regarded a necessary for a stable population.

⁶ Open Society Institute, 2005. "Early Childhood Development and Preschool Education Reforms Strategy for 2005-2010." OSI Strategy Paper for Armenia.

to almost 2% in 2003. In Ukraine, spending on the education sector as a percentage of GDP declined from 4.6% in 1992 to 3.8% in 2000.⁷ In the context of economic instability, rising unemployment, mass migration, and increasing poverty, the well-established pre-transition network of preschool institutions began to crumble. In Armenia, almost all departmental preschool institutions were closed down. The number of preschools decreased by around 13% over the period 1990-1996 and enrolment plummeted by almost 35% during the same period (see OSI Strategy Paper for Armenia). By 1997 there were only 411 preschools operating in Kyrgyzstan compared with 1604 in 1990. This initial decrease in the number of preschool institutions can be attributed to a variety of factors:

- With the collapse of adequate budgetary support for education, the quality of ECCE services offered deteriorated and parents stopped sending their children to preschools.
- The increase in unemployment meant women who lost their jobs stayed at home to take care of their children.
- Scarce financial resources facilitated the merging of some schools and the closure of others.
- The plunging birth-rate and long absences of children from preschools due to poverty-related causes meant fewer children enrolled at preschool institutions.
- The introduction fees to counter the reduced state allowance exacerbated access for the poor and the marginalised.

The deterioration and in some cases the collapse of social safety nets, e.g. childcare, family allowance, compensation and employment benefits has resulted in children or families with children becoming some of the most vulnerable sectors in these countries. A UNICEF case study reveals that in 2001 the poverty level in Armenia was directly related to the size of the household. An increase in the number of children aged 0-14 years resulted in a decline in living standards per child. Households having children below 7 years of age were among the most exposed to poverty as families bore the major brunt of the expenses of a child's education. In addition to the elderly and the unemployed, families with many children and families

⁷ Step by Step Foundation, 2004. "Education Sub-Sector Review: Ukraine – Towards Inclusive Education."

with young children represent identifiable pockets of poverty in Ukraine. Children, or families with children, have been the most hard-hit by the economic changes during the 1990s. Access to health and nutrition services has been limited which has had disastrous effects on the general welfare of the under-7 population and the fragmentation and deterioration of ECCE services has meant that access to adequate and quality preschool education is lacking in all of the countries under discussion.

2.2. The Effects of the Loss of Centralised Provision of ECCE

The other factor which played a decisive role in the range and quality of ECCE provision in the four countries was their principal strategy of educational reform – decentralization. The extent of the dis-aggregation of the pre-transition Soviet system of education was determined by the reforms of the political and administrative structures of the various countries during the transition period. In Armenia, for instance, in 1996 the establishment of different territorial administrative political structures resulted in the transferral to local authorities of the responsibility of preschool education provision. The fragmentation of responsibilities for preschool education mapped the contours of the state's administrative reforms with the state being in charge of the drawing up of curricula, pedagogical guidelines and educational standards, the regional authorities serving a mediating and monitoring function, and the local authorities implementing state educational policy and ensuring that children were enrolled in preschool institutions. The rationale that girded the reform strategy emphasised the local benefits for the supply and provision of ECCE not only in that decentralisation offered the possibility of local supply responding better to the specific needs of the community but also the potential of promoting greater involvement and accountability of parents and communities. Furthermore, decentralisation would open the field to different financing possibilities (through public-private partnerships) and other non-public providers, e.g. religious organisations, which would reduce the burden on the already constrained state finances. However, the justifications for the decentralisation strategy belied in many countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS both a disinvestment in ECCE and an abandonment of state responsibility for preschool education, financial and administrative.

After decentralisation the quality and coverage of ECCE rapidly deteriorated in all four countries. The number of facilities decreased as some kindergartens merged,

other shut down, and others began operating seasonally or shorter hours due to financial constraints and reduced number of children. Enrolment also plummeted. In Armenia the pace of reduction in the number of preschools accelerated – almost double compared to the period immediately prior to decentralisation (1990-1996).⁸ The editors of an OSI strategy paper suggest that decentralisation in Armenia, at least, was “an immature initiative” as local self governance bodies were not ready in managerial, professional and financial terms to assume responsibility for ECCE provision (see Open Society Institute, 2005). The lack of local capacity was coupled to an initial lack of attention by state authorities to ECCE as a result of its de-prioritisation. Case studies reveal that during the 1990 kindergartens and nurseries were often ignored or disregarded by government ministries.⁹ Absence of monitoring by regional authorities, loss of pedagogical assistance, shortages of teaching materials led to a rapid corrosion of ECCE supply, coverage and quality. The fragmentation of the education system has led in Armenia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan to a problem of congruity between kindergartens and schools. Due to the poor quality of most preschool education and the amelioration of the interdependent relationship between various levels of education in the pre-transition period, a larger of children that entered the first year of schooling were unprepared for the educational demands. School readiness became an urgent problem. Decentralisation in Romania and Ukraine developed along slightly different lines from Armenia with different aspects of ECCE responsibility under the auspices of different ministries. An overlap of responsibilities between the different ministries (often the ministries of health and the ministries of education) and between ministries and municipal bodies led to a confusion over budget allocations and ministerial accountability and ultimately to local inefficiency. The lack of ministerial integration and cross-sectoral co-ordination are fundamental stumbling blocks to adequate ECCE supply in SEE.¹⁰ A concomitant of this lack of co-ordination is an absence of an integrated system for the collection of information regarding ECCE supply and coverage. Governments and lobbyist do not collect or possess adequate information and data on preschool institutions, their enrolment rates, their coverage etc. Lack of central databases, absence of formal

⁸ Open Society Institute, 2005.

⁹ Tadevosyan, Gohar. “Early Childhood Development in Armenia: Evidence from the Field: Report on Pre-School Education Needs.” Save the Children, Step by Step Benevolent Foundation, World Vision Armenia, 2002.

¹⁰ See Rostgaard, T. “Family Support Policy in Central and Eastern Europe” and Zafeirakou, A. in this report.

mechanisms for dissemination of information related to the field, and insufficient exchange of information between parents, teachers, administrators and government agencies leads to a serious lack of knowledge, knowledge essential for the management, effectiveness and efficiency of educational reforms. The management of knowledge remains an important imperative for ECCE.

Within the framework of decentralisation, quality service is inevitably related to the state of health of the local economy; consequently, poor municipalities and local authorities were unable to provide adequate and quality preschool education. The loss of good teachers, inadequate in-service teacher training and the lack of capacity to maintain preschool facilities exacerbated the state of affairs. Decentralisation also worked to aggravate inequalities between the wealthier urban and the relatively poorer rural communities in Romania, Ukraine and Armenia, between different regions within a single country (e.g. highest poverty levels in 2001 were recorded in those parts of Armenia impacted by poor agriculture, the 1989 earthquake and the Karabakh conflict), and between people from different socio-economic classes (as the introduction of fees to make up for the budgetary shortfalls hinders access for the poor). The early transition period saw the emergence of national identities and a corresponding struggle for resources which resulted in some countries with an increased discrimination against minorities. This left a legacy of unequal access to preschool education with regards to these minorities. In Romania, for instance, Roma not only represent one of the most disadvantaged sectors of society but also one that accesses preschool services the least. As recent as 2002-3302 and despite efforts by the Romanian government to remove inequities in the education system particularly for Roma, Roma children's participation in preschool education is four times lower than the aggregate enrolment for the country.¹¹ While in most of the countries under discussion, preschool institutions catering for ages 3-6/7 were under some control of state agencies either through inspectorate (Romania) and monitoring (Armenia) functions or through the provision of pedagogical guidelines and the drawing of curricula objectives, institutions which catered for those children below the age of 3 were, in most cases, under the authority of the local administrative body. In Romania, for instance, there is therefore no education policy for children between 0-3 years of age or for institutions serving this group. During the 1990s we detect a sharp decline

¹¹ UNICEF, 2005. "Early Childhood Education (ECE) Strategy (as part of the Convergent Early Childhood Development (ECD) Strategy). – Romania."

in the number of nurseries or day care centres and the few that did function rehearsed the role they played in the pre-transition education model i.e. an essentially custodial one. In Romania, before 1989 there 902 nurseries catering for almost 90 000 children but by 2004 the number of facilities had dropped to 287 serving approximately 11 000 children.¹² The absence of state interest in preschool care and education for children younger than 3 led the Ministry of Health in Romania, under whose auspices they historically were, to absolve itself of this responsibility – nurseries were thus left without any governmental support or formal identity.¹³ During the 1990s, decentralisation led directly to both the rapid deterioration of the quality, access, supply and coverage of ECCE and the virtual collapse of institutions providing care for children aged 0-3. The high fees for day care services further exacerbated socio-economic disparities as only employed parents could afford to send their children to these centres.

Signs of Recovery: Economic Growth, and Changes in Legislation and National Policy Frameworks

In the four countries under discussion the first decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union was exemplified by a series of crises – social, political, economic crises and, in the case of Armenia, natural disaster as well – which had for the most part disastrous consequences for ECCE. The first five years of the new millennium, however, has registered signs of recovery and stability which on the ECCE front has rendered greater state attention and investment and a corresponding re-evaluation of decentralisation reform by a move towards a strategy of greater coordination and integration of services. Armenia saw economic growth average about 6.68% during the 1990s due, in large part, to international assistance and money transfers from Armenians abroad. However, right up to 2001 economic growth did not increase employment. In 2002 1% economic growth resulted for the first time since independence in an increase in employment.¹⁴ Ukraine's GDP in 2000 showed the first growth since the fall of the formal economy (an export-based growth of 6%) as industrial production grew by 12.9%.¹⁵ The economy continued to grow over the next

¹² UNICEF, 2004. "Early Education in Romania." UNICEF, Step by Step Centre for Education Development, Institute for Mother and Child Care.

¹³ UNICEF, 2005. "Early Childhood Education (ECE) Strategy – Romania."

¹⁴ UNICEF 2003. Case Study: Parent Education Project – Armenia.

¹⁵ Step by Step Foundation, 2004. "Education Sub-Sector Review."

few years (a GDP increase of 9% in 2001 and 8.2% in 2003). Birth rates also rose for the first time – the 2002 figures reveal a 3% hike compared to the previous year. All four countries have seen in the past few years a slight but steady increase in GDP. This has been matched by a slowing down in the rate of decrease in fertility and improvements in infant and under-5 mortality rates. Compared with the 1989 figures, we see an average decrease of 35% in IMR and 41% decrease in under-5 mortality, with Ukraine showing the least improvement. In terms of maternal mortality rates, however, Ukraine (and Romania) indicates stable progress. These more or less positive indicators correspond with improvements in ECCE. It is during the period of initial economic growth (2002-2003) in Armenia that we see enrolment rates for preschool education stabilising with the decrease in the number of preschool institutions stopping. Romania, as with most countries of SEE, has registered, in recent years, a recovery in net enrolment rates for 3-6 year olds. Romania's net enrolment rate is now higher than at the beginning of transition due, in large part, to the establishment of a compulsory year of preschool education.

Across the region surveyed, governmental support for the improvement and expansion of ECCE has increased over the recent years either as a result of active lobbying by NGOs, international agencies and donor bodies or through reforms put in place with EU accession in mind. This has meant greater consideration not only for the importance of ECCE for the comprehensive development of the child but also for urban/rural and socio-economic disparities. In Romania, Zafeirakou points out, governmental support, NGO involvement and the prospect of EU accession has resulted in targeted policies for rural communities, the poor and minorities, upgrading of teacher education, improvement of curricula and textbooks etc (2006). For kindergartens in Kyrgyzstan, presently, standards, curricula and personnel protocols are firmly established. The lack of governmental support, financial constraints and the decentralisation strategy during the 1990s facilitated greater involvement in the ECCE field of NGOs (and other external organisations) and parents (and communities). The former have played a significant role in the provision of alternative ECCE programmes, the investigation of different pedagogical methods than those offered by the host countries, the lobbying of governments in terms of the importance of adequate and quality ECCE, and through partnerships with government the exploration of a variety of ECCE forms. This led, in the cases of Romania, Armenia and Ukraine, to a strengthening of civil society, the backbone of democratic reform.

The latter has facilitated parents and communities feeling that they have an important role to play in the education of their children and thus has created for them a greater ownership of ECCE processes. Parents' involvement in education schemes (through government and/or NGO initiatives) has played a major role in the progress of infant and under-5 mortality rates registered in all of the countries, in combating the spread of communicable diseases and thus preventing long absences from preschool institutions, and in raising awareness of health, nutrition and development issues involving children.

3.1. Recent Changes in Legislation and National Policy Frameworks.

A comprehensive evaluation of changes in early childhood care and education in the four countries would look at a range of issues from supply, coverage, teacher training, NGO involvement, parental education schemes etc. However, due to length restrictions we have chosen to focus on legislative reforms, changes in national policy frameworks, and transformations in the content of ECCE syllabi and curricula. A closer look at legislative changes, policy reforms, and ECCE practice in recent years help reveal transformations in ECCE provision, access and coverage. The early transition period for most post-communist countries was characterised by a distinct lack of legislation or national policy for ECCE. Legal provisions were related to children's rights - care, nutrition, social protection etc. In Kyrgyzstan it was only through the general law on public health that the rights of children to sound physical, cognitive and psychosocial development were addressed. In Ukraine no specific policy on ECCE has been accepted or is in place. Hitherto there were no national systems for monitoring school readiness in the countries discussed. In Romania, however, the 'Law on Education' addresses the educational needs of children aged 3-6. Due to the dire state ECCE reached during the 1990s and through active lobbying of NGOs many governments of the transitional countries adopted targeted national ECCE policies. The Armenian government adopted a series of national policies and passed a variety of laws to address the severe shortcomings of the deregulated and decentralised provision of ECCE which came about with the fragmentation of the education system in 1996. The 'Law on Education' was passed in 1999. Its two main objectives were to set standards for the physical, ethical and mental development of preschool children - to ensure school readiness; and to place emphasis on the national co-ordination of ECCE services - a re-integration strategy. A more comprehensive programme for preschool education development was approved in 2000, which

significantly centralised the role of the family in terms of the supply of ECCE. A law was also passed on the 2001-2005 Programme for Educational Development. After decentralisation in Armenia, as state subsidies for local authorities failed to contain a separate item for preschool institutions and as no funding was provided for the acquisition of toys and writing and pedagogic materials the new law placed emphasis on greater regulation thus establishing a state budget item for financing specifically preschool education. A separate portion of the subsidy was to be provided to communities for the maintenance of preschools, the acquisition of teaching materials etc. Legislation was also put into place to regulate the re-training of management and professional staff. As pointed out earlier, the first years of the new millennium has seen preschool enrolment rates stable in Armenia and the rapid decrease in the number of preschool institutions after decentralisation stopping. However, the editors of an OSI strategy paper on early childhood education in Armenia argue that recent legislation fails to regulate the activities of non-public and alternative preschool service providers, and also does not stipulate the rules for service provision and their methodological enrolment rates, despite the recent legislative changes marking a radical improvement on ECCE support and regulation.¹⁶

In Romania legislative changes has had a dramatic impact on preschool enrolment. With the introduction of a compulsory pre-primary class, enrolment rates have soared to above pre-transition levels. Children entering primary school with previous preschool experience in 2004-2005 amounted to 86.8 percentage points – the highest amongst the countries surveyed.¹⁷ The Romanian government also launched the ‘National Strategy for Early Education’ this year which addresses the care and educational needs of children from birth to 7 years with particular emphasis on children from low income and disadvantaged areas, Roma children and children with special educational needs. The strategy aims at the expansion and improvement of ECCE in line with EU directives and has various objectives from the rehabilitation of the kindergarten infrastructure to providing integrated early education services. Similarly, the Ministry of Education of Kyrgyzstan recently adopted a Master Plan for Education which is supported by the Asian Development Bank to counter the effect the collapse of budgetary support of health and education services has had. Despite impressive reforms in both these sectors and despite having well established standards

¹⁶ Open Society Institute, 2005.

¹⁷ Cf. 45.8% for Ukraine for the period 2001-2002

and experienced personnel in the monitoring, supervision and evaluation of ECCE, the delivery of primary health care and preschool care and education have been seriously constrained by the economic crisis which besets the country. The Master Plan not only emphasises the critical role of early childhood care and education but also aims to explore alternative means of ECCE provision especially, in the context of financial scarcity, a shift to home-based ECCE, monitored and supervised by education ministry.

Certain conclusions may be drawn from the above summary of recent legislative and policy changes with regards to ECCE.

- The field has seen a dramatic improvement in policy. Most approaches tend to try and find a balance between a focus on individuality and an emphasis on social responsibility. Concomitants of these approaches are greater parental involvement and more subtly a strengthening of civil society.
- Economic progress it seems is not sufficient in itself to facilitate the improvement and expansion of ECCE. Governmental support and targeted policies/legislative changes are essential for this process and these changes have led directly to improvement of services.
- The changes in national policy and legislation in all four countries reveal both an acknowledgment of the severe problems with the loss of centralised provision and a largely deregulated preschool education system and the need for greater co-ordination, regulation and integration of ECCE services provided by the relevant ministries.
- The prospect of EU accession and NGO involvement have also helped to draw attention to the importance of ECCE and ensure policies that are directed at addressing access and equity issues for socially vulnerable and marginalised groups. These effects are noticeable in Romania, for example. In countries where EU accession is still not a relevant issue, the role of UN organisations can be accentuated to provide a similar spur to educational reform
- Although some state attention is now being paid to ECCE services catering for children aged 0-3, there is still insufficient emphasis on care and education for this group.
- Even though legislative changes and transformations of policy frameworks suggest an advance in the field, market realities determine the implementation of reforms and inevitably lead to increased disparities in the provision of quality ECCE services.

3.2. Changes in Curricula and their Objectives.

Recent legislative and policy changes have been accompanied by greater clarification of the ministries of education of development objectives of ECCE and increased regulation of frame curricula and syllabi. A shift on three fronts can be detected.

- Comprehensive Care and Education for preschool children: There is move towards addressing the comprehensive development of the child in line with the first goal of EFA. In Romania, for instance, a ministerial ordinance passed in 2000 emphasised the realisation of the full potential of the child with special focus on physical, social, emotional, learning, language and aesthetic development.
- Child-Centred Methodology: We see a revolution in content and method with increasing focus on child-centred methodologies and a change from the emphasis on the 'collectivity' in the process of socialising children in the Soviet ECCE model to a privileging of the individual in recent curricula changes. Kyrgyzstan's state standard for preschool education adopted in 1998 is exemplary in this regard. It not only defines competence (language skills, memory etc.) and moral development as its main priorities but also emphasises the importance of self-expression, self-development and self-security.
- During the 1990s institutions catering for the care and education of children younger than 3 years of age were left almost entirely to their own devices ostensibly either under the sole authority of the local governance bodies (Armenia) or the supervision of the Ministry of Health (Ukraine and Romania). These institutions provided basic medical care and a custodial service with little or no educational dimension. A legislative shift towards greater regulation, financial support, and the setting up of pedagogical guidelines and educational standards for providers catering for this age group can be detected. In Ukraine during 2000-2005 the various government ministries involved in ECCE developed, published and introduced, with help from UNICEF, in all regions a national programme for the development of children younger than three years of age. The Romanian 2006 'National Strategy for Early Education' also aims to maintain, develop and improve the supply of ECCE for this age group.

4. Recommendations

Five broad conclusions and recommendations are suggested based on this study:

- The impetus towards a coherent national strategy in ECCE, which coordinates the efforts of the ministries of education, health and social welfare and incorporate

partnerships with local government, civil society and international agencies, is a welcome development. Continued urgent attention must be given to inclusion to ensure that vulnerable children are not marginalised and that social disparities are not made worse during ECCE reforms.

- Broader inclusion in quality ECCE services is largely dependent on effective knowledge management and the effective monitoring of targeted policy outcomes especially in relation to vulnerable children. While the state should be responsible for standards and an overall framework for information gathering, greater civil accountability for ECCE should be provided through independent monitoring of outcomes and meaningful partnerships with civil society and international agencies.
- The need for increased and efficiently spent central state funding for ECCE services is inescapable and does not detract in anyway from the need for an increase role for parents, communities and local government. Urgent advocacy strategies should be developed to continue to put on pressure for larger expenditure from the state budget and for more attractive terms for government loans for ECCE from the larger development banks.
- A rebuilding of infrastructure, capacity and resources for ECCE is all important in the wider region, the aim should to rebuild better than before in every respect. Thus the 'revolution' in child-centred methodologies, social justice-oriented curricula, enabling approaches to teacher development and management training must be maintained as central parts of the advocacy agenda to extend ECCE services at least as widely as they were before the collapse of the soviet system.
- The UN, other international agencies and the many NGOs are essential partners in the revitalization and development of quality ECCE in the wider region. Flexible partnerships and co-ordination are essential to maximize impact and bring about sustainable change.

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Table 1. GDP Per Capita*

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Armenia	2,700	2,400	1,730	1,490	1,500	1,660	1,770	1,840	2,080	2,210	2,420	2,730	3,120	3,790
Kyrgyzstan	1,980	1,860	1,620	1,410	1,170	1,120	1,200	1,350	1,390	1,460	1,560	1,640	1,620	1,690
Romania	5,320	4,830	4,600	4,800	5,100	5,610	5,970	5,740	5,550	5,580	5,720	6,160	6,560	7,140
Ukraine	6,930	6,580	6,200	5,570	4,330	3,950	3,640	3,630	3,660	3,760	4,110	4,570	4,870	5,430

Table 2. Total fertility rate*

	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Armenia	2.61	2.62	2.58	2.35	1.97	1.70	1.63	1.60	1.45	1.30	1.19	1.11	1.02	1.21	1.35
Kyrgyzstan	3.80	3.60	3.60	3.50	3.10	2.90	3.10	2.80	2.60	2.70	2.60	2.40	2.40	2.50	2.50
Romania	2.20	1.84	1.57	1.52	1.44	1.41	1.34	1.30	1.32	1.32	1.30	1.30	1.23	1.25	1.27
Ukraine	1.90	1.90	1.70	1.70	1.60	1.50	1.40	1.30	1.30	1.20	1.20	1.10	1.10	1.10	1.20

Table 3. Infant Mortality Rate/Under-5 mortality rate*															
	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Armenia	20.4	18.5	17.9	18.5	17.1	14.7	141.2	15.5	15.4	14.7	15.4	15.6	15.4	14.0	12.0
	27.1	23.8	22.6	24.2	24.2	21.4	19.9	19.5	19.5	18.4	19.3	19.9	18.8	16.6	13.6
Kyrgyzstan	32.2	30.0	29.7	31.5	31.9	29.1	28.1	25.9	28.2	26.2	22.7	22.6	21.7	21.2	20.9
	47.3	41.8	38.7	42.4	46.8	43.9	40.8	37.8	44.0	41.0	35.6	34.5	29.7	28.8	27.1
Romania	26.9	26.9	22.7	23.3	23.3	23.9	21.2	22.3	22.0	20.5	18.6	18.6	18.4	17.3	16.7
	34.9	35.7	30.9	30.5	30.3	29.7	26.2	27.5	26.4	24.6	22.6	22.2	21.9	20.8	19.7
Ukraine	13.0	12.8	13.9	14.0	14.9	14.5	14.4	14.3	14.0	12.8	12.8	11.9	11.3	10.3	9.6
	17.6	17.3	18.5	18.7	19.9	19.6	19.9	19.4	18.9	17.3	17.5	16.0	15.2	13.5	12.6

* Figures taken from TransMonee 2005, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre