

Global Early Childhood Community Optimistic about Outlook for Children

by Roger Neugebauer and Tara Schroder

Despite all the negative news in recent years about war, natural disasters, and political upheavals, three out of four individuals from the community of the World Forum Foundation (WFF) indicated that the outlook for children in their country will moderately or significantly improve in coming years. The only countries where the outlook is seen likely to deteriorate were Australia, Brazil, England, Slovakia, and the United States.

Fifty members of the WFF community responded to this biennial survey on the status of young children. Respondents play a number of leadership roles in the WFF — National Reps (who are the eyes and ears of the WFF in 110 countries), Global Leaders for Young Children (emerging leaders being mentored by the WFF), members of International Advisory Group (IAG [advising WFF on future activities]), World Forum Alliance (international NGOs working in partnership with the WFF), and World Forum board members.

Asia/Pacific

Australia

Ian Alchin, Board of Directors, IAG

The Child's Rights Taskforce reports that "the health care, health status, and rate of mortality of Australian children has continued to improve in recent years." However, low socio-economic and

minority ethnic families are associated with less access to primary health care. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to be over-represented in lower health and education outcomes. The number of children in out-of-home care due to family violence and maltreatment has more than doubled since 2000 with indigenous children and those with a disability over-represented. The health and safety of refugee children and particularly those held indefinitely in mandatory detention continues to be of significant concern. Australia continues its commitment to a national early childhood curriculum framework and quality standards. There has been an increased investment in subsidising children's attendance of early childhood settings, though there has been a shift in policy to focus principally on supporting parents' access to work. A "Universal Access" policy provides funding to achieve a goal of 95% of children in preschool programs in the year prior to school and receive a minimum of 600 hours of preschool education. The current commitment ends in 2017. Recent results from the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) shows Australia's educational outcomes, though still above the OECD average, are declining and particularly in regional and remote locations, and more significant in regard to indigenous families.

Bangladesh

Manjusree Mitra, Nat Rep,
Global Leader

When I think about the status of children in Bangladesh it comes to my mind the children of 0–8 years old. The status of children varies from location to location, parents' occupations, rich, middle-income or low-income families. There is no conclusion. Rich people think they are providing all sorts of learning materials, playing materials, expensive clothes and foods, exposure to different countries. But I have doubt about whether the parents are providing the appropriate nursing to their children, whether they are interacting properly, as parents are very busy with their own businesses. Same as the low-income families, they are also busy with the earning purposes, they are not able to provide all sorts of goods, materials,



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or exposure to many things; what else they can do. The middle-income families are the only basis to learn the theory of ECD and practice those to reach optimum level of potentiality of their children. However, considering all these, our country situation is gradually improving. NGOs are playing a great role to promote ECD in the country, they are advocating strongly with the government to make them understand about the importance of early years, inclusiveness, pluralism, and many other areas of ECD. At present, one year preschool is established in all primary schools, and the policy is two years preschooling; gradually it will happen with the preprimary. Good news is that day care and early learning centers are increasing day by day. Children's books, learning materials, toys are available in cities. Once again, in many cases parents are aware about the well-being of their own children, but not aware about the rest of the children. One thing people should know is that a child cannot grow alone, she needs cooperation, creative interaction, sharing information, learning from each other and growing properly. Parents are not aware about how to handle difficult situations, how to share messages with children, how to teach them dos and don'ts. There is another big area which is health and nutrition. People get support from the doctors about health, hygiene and nutrition, need-based medicine, physical growth; but the missing part is child development. Doctors hardly talk with the potential couples, pregnant mothers, and parents about the development part of the child. I think we need to do huge work on child development from a mother's womb to eight years. We have progressed a lot during the last 20 years, but we have to go far beyond. ECD has been introduced in the university curriculum and included in the primary teachers' training course. There is a National ECD Network in the country and every year there is an Annual Conference of the network; we have

significant presence in regional network ARNEC and in the global network of the World Forum Foundation. Hopefully in the future Early Childhood Care and Development will get special focus in the relevant Ministries like Ministry of Finance, Education, Health, Food, and Social Welfare.

China

Yanhua Chen, Global Leader

In China, according to our ministry of education, now we have 223,700 kindergarten-age children. On average 75% of children can go to kindergarten. In developed east coast cities like Shanghai, almost 100% of kids can go to kindergarten. However, in the western part of China, the enrollment will be much lower. Government statistics show that more than 60 million children in rural areas parents have left home to search for work in the city. And the problem has reached a national scale because those kids who were cared for by grandparents suffer from poor living conditions, lagging educational attainment, insecurity, and difficulty in communication.

Fiji

Shabreen Nisha, Global Leader

Children from rural areas remain disadvantaged due to natural disasters and lack of access to proper facilities for education. Most of the children with disabilities don't get the service they require and deserve due to lack of facilities.

India

Siva Prasad Behera, Global Leader

India's Government, with the aim of providing integrated services for the holistic development of all children from the prenatal period to six years, has passed a National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy effective from 27 September, 2013 that charts the way forward for a comprehensive

approach towards ensuring a sound foundation for every child. India has 158.7 million children in the 0–6 age group, per the 2011 Census. There is an inadequate understanding of the concept of ECCE, its philosophy, and its importance among different stakeholders running non-formal preschool. In India pre-primary education is imparted through multiple channels; quality is a major concern. Another issue is lack of attention to below three-year-old children. There are no parenting programs (home-based interventions) or creches available. Increased efforts are required by the government to strengthen Parenting Services for optimum developmental of children. Parents and caregivers need to gain the knowledge and skills needed to provide their child with age appropriate learning opportunities and developmental stimulation, in order to prepare children for pre-primary education. This area also needs special attention of the government.

India

Amrita Jain, IAG, National Rep

The situation of young children is a matter of great concern. The recent trend in malnutrition status shows 39% stunted, 29% underweight, and 15% wasted. The Infant Mortality Rate is 40 of 1000 live births. Immunization is 65.3%. The indicators clearly depict a low priority for young children in Law, Policy, and Program. The total budget for young children is only about 1%. With 51.3% of the population in the poverty threshold, survival issues take priority amongst communities as against the young child; therefore, the demand for quality services for young children is low and thus the supply does not have the required quality. Recent policy on ECCE and revision of some programs helps us to be more optimistic for the future of young children in India.

Indonesia

Antarina SF Amir, National Rep

Indonesia is the world's fourth most populous country, with more than 238 million people living in an archipelago comprising over 17,500 islands. Indonesia has set a long-term goal for young children so that they benefit from Early Childhood and Care Education (ECCE); however, we realize that only a small amount of children benefit from ECCE, especially children in remote and rural communities. Therefore, the Indonesian government has invested more attention and funds in ECCE in order to bring significant change to young children's capacity to develop themselves and learn for the future; human capital is the key to the betterment of Indonesia. In 2013, the government of Indonesia issued a presidential decree on the implementation of a National Strategy for Holistic Integrated Early Childhood Development (HIECD), integrating early learning and stimulation with basic health services. One of the reasons for HIECD is to overcome the infant, under-5, and maternal mortality rates in Indonesia. The government continues to invest in health care with Antenatal support and safe delivery: Maternal and Neo-natal Child Health and Posyandu (Integrated Health Centers). For Early Childhood Development and Education — children two- to six-years-old — the government has accelerated the growth of center-based programs along with new guidelines and tools (training, curriculum, support materials) and has expanded the focus from school readiness to a more comprehensive child development, active learning, and learning through play approach.

Kazakhstan

Dina Aidzhanova, National Rep

The government accepted six years ago the program, "Bolpan" which directed the building of new schools for preschool aged children ages

three to six. The aim was to cover 70% of children and nowadays 65.4% of children have the possibility to get educational services, three times the nutrition and medical care. In Kazakhstan there are 2,591 kindergarten/preschools and 5,000 mini-centers. In so called mini-centers children stay half a day only, but in kindergarten they stay from 8 AM till 5 PM. Parents pay for nutrition and cover additional services like dancing, playing chess, and so on. Caregivers and teachers are mainly professionals graduated from colleges and pedagogical institutes but there are problems to find them; because of low salary they prefer to look for other jobs. It is a dilemma — very few professionals stay and the quality is low. There are a lot of private kindergartens, preschools, and developmental centers. When compared with state institutions, they have good conditions — there are 12–15 children in the group versus 27–35 in state programs. In private schools, nutrition is better, but only where parents manage it. In state preschools/kindergartens, nutrition is not bad, but in rural areas it is poor. Private schools do not allow government specialists to check their work without permission of a manager. Actually, communities sometimes have no access to them. In general there are good perspectives to improve access to quality education in state schools, but speaking of private — it depends. In Kazakhstan there are a lot of NGOs that try to be helpful and useful to contribute the development of young children, for instance Step-by-Step. This NGO cooperates with local governments in rural areas and makes efforts to involve parents and community in developing children, providing instruments to work together. It is a pity to observe the disappointment of parents, and the disorder they experience because of financial problems, crises, and inequities of power.

Myanmar

K. Seng Raw, Global Leader,
National Rep

Myanmar/Burma, situated in Southeast Asia, is one of the most isolated and disaster prone countries in the world. A newly elected democratic Government, with Daw Aung San Su Kyi as the State Counsellor, took over power in April 2016, paves an optimistic path both for local and global involvements, yet the country continues to face many challenges. The internally displaced people — about 218,000 people of which about four-fifths are women and children — live in camps and host villages in Kachin, Shan, and Rakhine states as a result of conflict, violence, and inter-communal tensions (Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2017). Myanmar is vulnerable to a wide range of natural hazards, civil wars and conflicts, and has problems with nutrition and education among the children. Currently, access to ECCD services in Myanmar lags far behind most other countries in the Asia-Pacific Region. There is a great deal of disadvantages across the country, especially for the children in remote areas. Young children are facing a great difficulty, and are experiencing impossibility for success and being vulnerable. The key factors for it are health and social services, malnutrition, economic migration, armed conflicts and internal displacement, natural disasters, and preventive diseases. They need high-quality ECCD services for the holistic development, cost effectiveness, and accessibility of the services. Many experts from Myanmar and abroad put the ECCD services as one of the most important social and economic investment to maximize other sectors. Thus we, the ECCD Working Group which makes up representatives from civil society organizations, national and international non-government organizations, and individuals have been trying our best to advocate for and support the collaborative implementation and

realization of “Every child has a right for development” in Myanmar according to the Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC) and the Multi Sector ECCD Policy.

Nepal

Dhirendra Lamsal, Global Leader,
National Rep

Although Nepal has ensured children’s rights to basic health, nutrition, and education, the resources allocated by the government have not been able to provide minimum services to all children, especially children below 16 years, which constitutes 41% of the total population of Nepal. The current under-5 mortality rate is 38 per 1,000 live births while the neonatal mortality rate is 23 per 1,000 live births. Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2014 has reported that stunting of children under five is 37% whereas underweight prevalence rate is 30% and children with low birth rate accounts for 24%. Exclusive breastfeeding of infants under 6 months is 57%. Every year 27,000 children die due to diarrhea. Around 10% of the children are still out of reach of immunization programs. Over 34,000 pre-primary classes have been established across the country to date. Eighty-seven percent of children are admitted in primary level school, but about 40% stop school before primary level is completed. Among the school-age children, 48% are girls. There are 2.6 million child laborers in Nepal and children have contributed 6% of Nepal’s total domestic production. Still, a large number of children are vulnerable to various forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence.

New Zealand

Peter Reynolds, World Forum Alliance

New Zealand has a strong focus on the needs of children. Child health is a key issue for New Zealanders, although we are conscious of the high proportion of children in our country who experience some level of poverty in their lives. On the Education front, the Education Act is being

reviewed to better place children at the centre of our thinking and action. Our early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, is being refreshed to better reflect modern practices. Efforts are underway to align our early childhood education system with our primary schools so that the transition is seamless. We are working to better measure and report a child’s learning outcomes. Our goal is to have 98% of children experience quality early childhood education before starting primary school. We know that this helps children achieve the best outcomes. We currently sit at 96% and are improving daily.

Philippines

Denise Zara, National Rep

Kindergarten is now recognized as a prerequisite before children can enter 1st grade at any private and public school. This gives them assurance that early childhood education happens. As far as socio-economic circumstances, there is still a wide gap between the rich and the poor.

Singapore

Lily Wong, National Rep

In summary: Singapore early childhood education is based on three factors — Affordability, Accessibility, and Quality for all the young children (0–6). Every child from two months old will have a place in child care and preschool near to home or parents’ workplace and all teachers are registered and monitored for quality. The government funds each infant two months–17 months \$600 per month for infant care services and from 18 months–6 years \$300 per month for full-time child care services. This makes it affordable; the fees are capped at \$800/month. Accessible centers are built around the residence clusters or workplace of the parents. Quality is assessed by the government-controlled Singapore Preschool Accreditation framework, which is a quality rating

scale. Teacher training is controlled/standardized by the industry-based curriculum teaching and assessment framework.

Sri Lanka

Nanditha Hettitanti, Global Leader,
National Rep, IAG

In Sri Lanka an Early Childhood Care and Development policy sets the framework and the Ministry of Child Development administers the services for care and well-being of young children. While the social indicators are good in terms of young children’s care, education, and development, there is still a great disparity of nutritional status and accessibility of quality early childhood services by young children and families in rural, poverty-stricken, and post-conflict resettlement areas.

Thailand

Sheldon Shaeffer, IAG

The political situation in Thailand is stagnant as is the economic situation, so no new investments or progress in the status and outlook for children is foreseen. The context will not deteriorate, but it will also not improve.

Eastern/Western Europe

England

Laura Henry, National Rep

The current situation in England for children is very fragile. The main reason is the cuts being made by central government. Particularly hard hit have been children’s centres, many of which formed the hub of the community (child-minders, nurseries, and preschools) and acted as a one-stop-shop for families, offering day care as well as advice for parents on health, nutrition and housing. They were much needed in providing a holistic support. In addition, we have a period of ‘too much too soon,’ where ‘schoolification’ is happening

for children within their early years. Children are expected to do more, much of which is not developmentally appropriate, such as preparing for tests, which has a negative impact on their life-long learning and development. On a brighter note, the Early Years sector continues to work together, to speak out and offer solutions on behalf of the little people of the United Kingdom.

England

Lisa Smith, Global Leader

Children from Romani and Traveller communities in England are more likely to experience early death (10–12 years lower than the national average), poor childhood development, have a limited uptake and access to healthcare, and are overrepresented as living in poverty. “There is an excess prevalence of miscarriages, stillbirths, and neonatal deaths in Gypsy and Traveller communities and high rates of maternal death during pregnancy and shortly after childbirth” (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012). The infant mortality rate is three times higher than the national average and these groups of children are behind peers at every key stage of their education. These children experience severe educational exclusion in terms of lowest rates of academic achievement, attendance to preschool and secondary, and the highest rates of permanent school exclusions. Racism and prejudice in schools can be contributing factors to these outcomes and the longstanding vibrant history of Romani and Traveller populations is largely ignored in the curriculum. However, despite the statistical evidence held by the Department for Education, there continues to be no national inclusion strategy specifically to address these issues. The way Romani and Travellers are viewed by policymakers influences and shapes how policy is formed and implemented towards them, the consistent inequalities particularly in education highlights

failure to adopt effective and appropriate policy and include the communities in the planning and decision making stages. Due to a long history of persecution in the British Isles, many Romani and Traveller communities are often distrustful of accessing support from public services. Traveller Education Services (TES) were set up to address disadvantages in education and took a holistic approach around supporting the whole family and acted as advocates to build trusting relationships between schools and home, and improved the numbers of children accessing preschool and primary education. However, most TES no longer exist due to funding cuts. This is having a detrimental impact on the communities and persistent inequalities are only set to widen, this coupled with the academisation of the school system has created a climate where results driven ethos are contradicting inclusive learning environments and Romani and Traveller children are being left further behind. The education and social care system has lost a key force that delivered training and promoted understanding of Romani and Traveller ethnicity and culture. The Department for Education shows between 2009 and 2016 the number of Travellers of Irish Heritage in care has risen by 350% and the number of Gypsy/Roma children has risen 833%. The increases that are reported are not consistent with National trends, and when compared to population data, suggest that Romani and Traveller children living in the UK could be three times more likely be taken into public care than any other children.

Ireland

Aisling Gillen, National Rep

The State of the Nation’s Children Report: Ireland 2012 states that more than 1.1 million children are now living in Ireland, one in four of the population. The baby boom has continued despite the country’s economic difficulties and

the collapse of the Celtic Tiger. The child population continued to rise in the decade to 2011, with a 13.4% surge recorded, resulting in Ireland having the highest percentage of children, at 25% of the total population in the expanded EU. The Minister for Children in Ireland has claimed these statistics offer ‘unprecedented potential’ for Ireland’s economic future. But the Government has warned that the stark rise in the under-17 population poses challenges in planning with schools set to need 3,000+ new teachers over the years ahead. Challenges include improving the affordability and accessibility of childcare — particularly as the preschool population has surged by 18% since 2006. The Government has furthered its investment in early childhood services incrementally over the last three years. But the level of public spending on early intervention and services for children is being questioned, as Ireland has a legacy of providing direct cash payments, instead of investing in services. For example, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs will spend \$320 million on early intervention and child care services, compared to billions on child-benefit payments and allowances. Recent census figures have confirmed that the proportion of children in consistent poverty in Ireland has substantially increased from 6% to 11.8%. A 2014 UNICEF Report has ranked Ireland 37th out of 41 countries in terms of child poverty. However, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in Ireland are working hard to combat child poverty. A range of initiatives have been undertaken. The DCYA have set up 13 Area-based Anti-poverty Projects to help break the cycle of disadvantage in particularly deprived communities, under its national Policy Framework: Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures 2014 and The High-level Policy Statement on Parenting and Family Support 2015, both based on Principles from the EU Commission Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage. The

DCYA have also established a dedicated state agency for children and young people: Tusla, Child and Family Agency, under the Child and Family Agency Act 2013. The Agency was established on the 1 January, 2014 and is now the dedicated State agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children in Ireland. It represents the most comprehensive reform of child protection, early intervention, and family support services ever undertaken in Ireland. It brought together some 4,000 staff and an operational budget of over €700m. It also provides Educational Welfare Services. Tusla is in the process of establishing an area-based early intervention and prevention system across the country as part of its 'National Service Delivery Framework.' This involves implementing a new National Practice Model, Meitheal for early identification of need and help-provision at locality level and evidence-based approaches to supporting parents at all levels of need.

Europe

Italy

Aldo Fortunati, National Rep

Italy has a low fertility rate (1.35) lower than EU_28. This low birth rate will lead to a demographic decline in the next years. Furthermore, there's an aging process of the population due to the increasing life expectancy. Generally, the national health service provides universal care. We can affirm that the welfare indicators for the younger children are very positive: child mortality rate (0.3%) is one of the lowest in Europe. The impact of the economic crisis is increasing indicators on absolute and relative poverty, exposing the new generations to the consequences of a depletion of opportunities. About education, before compulsory school (from age six), the education services cover all children from age three to five, and 25% of children 0–2. The coverage is highly diversified territorially. In the last weeks,

a national reform, after a long debate, has been approved aiming to extend universal access to ECEC services. This could have positive consequences for the women's employment rate — still lower than the EU28 (number of European Union member countries) average (64%), also resulting in an overall positive impact on the country's economic development.

Montenegro

Biljana Maslovaric, National Rep

The guiding principle of the implementation of preschool education in Montenegro is the provision of quality services for early development and learning through a gradual and planned process of increasing the rate of coverage of children (by 2020, 95% coverage of children to be included in preschool education), further strengthening parental practices, and providing development of customized, targeted structured curricula. The system of early and preschool education will fulfill all the requirements in order to provide affordable, high-quality, comprehensive, culturally adapted, inclusive services for all children in Montenegro, from birth to pre-primary education, with special emphasis on the most vulnerable children. Will provide interdisciplinary, coordinated, and sustainable cooperation of the entire system in order to social inclusion of children to primary school.

Poland

Monika Rosciszewska-Wozniak, Global Leader, National Rep

The situation of the families with small children in Poland is a bit improved. From 2016, our government implemented "Program 500+." Every second and subsequent child in the family gets a grant of 500 PLN (approx. \$120) per month (up to 18 years of age). This reduced the scale of poverty, but still more than 30% of families are in

a difficult financial situation. Demographic growth is expected (so far was very low — 1.3); in the beginning of 2017, an increase in the birth rate has been reported. Paid parental leave is now longer (52 weeks). In 2016, we benefited from 507,000 women and 161,000 men (growing interest of father). Health care is universal and free for all children. Child care and education is divided into the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy (for children 0–3 years old) and the Ministry of National Education, which is responsible for preschool education (from 2.5–6 years old). Number of crèches, children's clubs, and micro-daycare (up to age 5 children) is slowly growing. A few years ago care nursery covered approximately 3% of needs. Currently about 30% of municipalities have been leading child care institutions. But this is still less than 100,000 places for approximately 7–8% of all children. In large cities, the situation is slightly better (about 10–15%), in the countryside and small towns the situation is bad. Innovative forms of informal education called Playgroups became popular (regular meetings with mothers and children) are affordable and possible to conduct even in a small village. Preschool education is free up to five hours a day. Availability for children 5–6 years old reaches 90%, but for the youngest children it is much worse (enrollment is approximately 50%). Kindergartens are implementing programs based on the base curriculum created by the government.

Slovakia

Stanislav Daniel, World Forum Alliance

I come from Slovakia and that is where I have the most detailed knowledge, even though I currently reside in the Netherlands and work internationally. I am also a coordinator of the current cohort of Global Leaders Europe. I believe that prospects for young children will deteriorate moderately, especially so for children coming from vulnerable fami-

lies, including Romani ethnic minority families. This deterioration will be primarily caused by inaction: currently, most Romani children do not have access to early childhood services and there are significant discrepancies between shares of Romani and non-Romani children in preschool education. Referencing the study of the European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), I wrote in a recent blog: "FRA has also found that 80% of Roma families surveyed are at risk of poverty (EU average is 17%): 30% live in households with no tap water. One-third of Romani children grow up in households where someone went to bed hungry at least once in the previous month. In Romania and Bulgaria, countries with the largest Roma populations in Europe, only 45% or 54% respectively have health insurance coverage"

(<http://reyn.blog.issa.nl/early-childhood-exclusion-strikes-harder-than-pessimists-thought/>). In addition, segregation of Romani children hits harder than we thought and most children grow up in a parallel world of ethnically homogeneous environments (<http://reyn.blog.issa.nl/humanrightsday-end-school-segregation-for-romani-children/>). Another worry is that the situation may be deteriorating by action, originally intended to help. Government of Slovakia is currently running a €30-million program supporting municipalities to build kindergartens. It is designed to help more than a thousand municipalities to grow their kindergarten capacities to bring in Romani children. The biggest worry in this case, however, is that

1) pure access without stress on quality may be harming the children, rather than helping them, and 2) even with 'free' kindergarten for families living under the line of poverty, nothing is free and there is a worry that kindergartens will not be attended by Romani children because of other limitations (e.g. costs of meals, lack of clothes or shoes in the extreme cases). Thus, even though the program is well intended, the action may eventually lead to conserved status quo with decreased

motivation to do more and an argument: "We have already provided them with opportunities, they did not use it."

Slovenia

Brigita Mark, Global Leader

Despite many different projects and strategies throughout the years, the enrollment of Roma children in ECEC is changing slowly. But the situation is improving and this is the main importance. There is still a gap between principled options and actual involvement. But the purpose of a new project called "Together for Knowledge" will take place in 2016-2021 to develop (the upgrading of existing and creation of new ones) support mechanisms skills for members of the Roma community. The aim of the system is also extended to several locations where these mechanisms are most necessary. The purpose of the project is consistent with the current Strategy for Education of Roma in the Republic of Slovenia.

Wales

Karen Graham, National Rep

There are many challenges in relation to narrowing the poverty gap. Strategies to address these challenges have been revised in light of evidence-based practice, in order to bring about further improvement while the curriculum for education for all children is being revised. Curricular improvements for children and young people are intended to address the need for innovation that draws on the best of national and international research in a bid to best serve children and young people of the 21st century.

Africa/Middle East

Ghana

Ebenezer Lartey, Global Leader

Children in Ghana are always seen with much excitement and energy, regardless

of income levels of the parents. Children are cared for by either their parents or other relatives. Most working-class parents send their kids to school early so they may attend to their regular business schedules and also help the child to develop school readiness skills. Sadly, traditional teaching methods are still common in the country, where teachers will be lecturing instead of acting as children's co-learners and learning through active play. Strict discipline and rote memorization are not uncommon, though this is not beneficial for children's learning. When a child is hurt or sad, caregivers rarely acknowledge their feelings; they only dismiss their tears. Some kids do not enjoy balanced meals; children are taken to school with food bought on the way. Just a few parents prepare meals for their children for school. There is also a deficiency of pediatrics within community clinics or hospitals. Only a few hospitals (public/private) have pediatrics. The joy is for parents who have registered for the National Health Insurance to have their children covered.

Israel

Anat Bar, National Rep

Israel's population is very diverse as the children grow up here. No one government agency looks after the young children; and it affects children. This created big gaps between children growing up in homes that provide quality education and children in disadvantaged populations. On the other side, many officials overseeing early childhood education and health have made notable achievements. I think we have to allow children to grow first of all warmly.

Lebanon

Rana Ismail, Global Leader

Unfortunately the status and outlook is worrying, both the national strategy for ECE and for the education of children

with special needs are frozen, and the rate of children diagnosed with cancer is increasing dramatically, due to pollution and due to the effect of weapons used during the war. Most funds are going to the relief efforts for the Syrian refugees, providing quality education and health care is becoming more and more a challenge. Thousands of Syrian children born in the last five years are without official registration papers, as if with no nationality. Studies released recently show that one-third of the Lebanese people are considered poor families, and instability of the political and security situations make it very difficult to give priority for planning or allocating budgets for a better childhood in Lebanon. It is very frustrating to see all the efforts we exerted as Global Leaders to put forward early childhood care and education fading away. Nevertheless the civic society and NGOs are still active and there are always initiatives trying to keep the momentum and providing education and psycho-social support for all children despite all the challenges. I personally had the opportunity to provide training for the mothers regarding their role for their children's development and a psycho-social support for them in Shatila Palestinian Camp, and I provided another program for the teachers of Syrian refugee children in their camps east of Lebanon. You will notice the refugee crisis in Lebanon caused the absence of any fund for developmental programs for the children. We are hoping things will start to be better; meanwhile, we remain Global Leaders trying our best for the best interest of all children.

Lesotho

Lati Lerotholi, National Rep

Children in Lesotho are immunized immediately after birth and later after birth. Babies who are born to mothers who are HIV positive are given ARVs to prevent transmission from the mothers to babies during birth. However, there

are those who are born at home and not under a birth attendant's care. Stunting is still high at 33%; only 33% of 3–5-year-olds access preschool; 15.4% of preschool teachers are trained; and birth registration stands at 45% for children. Violence against children is prevalent, especially to orphaned and vulnerable children. But there are legislations protecting them such as Child Protection and Welfare Act, Education Act and Sexual Offences Act, although enforcement is still a challenge. Poverty is one of the most prevalent problems facing young children in Lesotho as they live in very poor households, 57% of the population lives under the poverty line; that is why government with its partners such as UNICEF and European Union introduced Child Grant Programme, which targets ultra-poor households with children.

Liberia

Yukhiko D. Amnon, National Rep

Liberia, a West African country, has a population estimated at 4.4 million. Of this last official population, 1.1 million people live in Montserrado County, which is the most overcrowded county and home to the capital, Monrovia. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, during her two terms of service, has undertaken numerous steps in ensuring children between the ages of 0–5 receive childhood services that will help them develop and thrive in becoming responsible citizens. Though Liberia falls in the category of poorest countries in the world, she has been making all efforts to create enabling environments for young children. Our achievements from 2015 to date are not many, but will lead to a sustainable ECD program in years to come. The system is being set up building capacities (eight persons received Master of Arts in Child Development, 75 Master Trainers in early childhood education, and three cohorts of mental health clinicians), all in the spirit of improving services in

childhood. We are also in the process of establishing the first Early Childhood Development Professional Network that will foster decentralization of the holistic early childhood policy that Liberia has and help promote local early childhood groups.

Mauritius

Kistamah Soonita, Global Leader,
National Rep

In my country children's development and education has always been high on the agenda of all governments. Today at preprimary level (children aged 3–6 years) the enrollment rate is 98% and 100% for primary school children.

There are different welfare policies for the integration of poor and vulnerable children in the education system. With a view to improving life chances of vulnerable children, maximum support is provided to children from vulnerable families. For the period 2010 to 2014, an average of 22,700 (out of a population of 1.2 million people) needy children received school materials, and some 3,700 students of pre-primary and primary schools in Mauritius were provided with meals and transport facilities. We have a universal free health and education system, which is highly commendable and sustainable. The objective of the education system is to ensure learning opportunities accessible to all, provide learners with values and skills to further their personal growth, enhance their critical and exploratory thinking, and encourage them to innovate and to adapt to changes in an increasingly globalised environment. Mauritius has spared no effort to fulfill its pledge towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and has ensured that the goals figure prominently in the overall development planning and policy orientation of the country. Mauritius has achieved most of the MDG targets relating to eradicating extreme poverty and hunger,

achieving preprimary and primary education, promoting gender equality and combating HIV / AIDS, ensuring access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, providing access to free health services which has been contributing to the welfare of young children. Improving infant and child health are pivotal to fulfilling the rights of children under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Progress is being made towards achieving this MDG target. The under-5 mortality rate has dropped from 23.1 in 1990 to 16.0 in 2014. The infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births) dropped from 20.4 in 1990 to 14.5 in 2014.

Nigeria

Margaret Akinware, National Rep

Nigerian children currently find themselves in a period of harsh economic recession in a country with a population of 182.2 million, over 31 million of whom are under five years; GDP per capita of 3.4%, annual inflation rate of 19%, even as each child is faced at birth with a life expectancy of only 53 years. In descending order, Nigeria ranks seventh worldwide among the countries with highest U5 mortality rate at 109 in 1,000 live births; infant and neonatal mortality rates of 102 and 34 in 1,000 live births respectively. The underlying causes of these rather high mortality and morbidity rates could be traced to poor antenatal care when only 51% of mothers attend the mandatory four ANC sessions and only 38% of delivery cases are taken by skilled birth attendants. Many more children are delivered by untrained birth attendants with concomitant consequences to both the mother and the newborn child. Maternal mortality ratio remains high at 550 in 100,000 live births as reported cases while the adjusted ratio stands at 814 (SOWC, 2016). In addition, 15% of newborn babies have low birthweight, 33% are initiated early to breastfeeding, while only 17% are exclusively breastfed

until six months of age. For all U5 children, 20% are underweight, 33% stunted, 8% wasted and live in environment where 29% urban and rural dwellers have access to improved sanitation facilities and 69% have access to improved drinking water. In all, 43% of children benefit from early childhood care and education (with a high dichotomy: 10% among the poorest 20%, vis-a-vis 84% among the richest). Fathers' support for early learning is only 37%, pre-primary gross enrollment ratio is 13% for all children. Birth registration is 30%, while cases of child labour is 25% for boys and girls. The Federal Government and its development partners are taking the desired measures to improve on the stated situations in the country.

Sierra Leone

Bangura Marin B, Global Leader, National Rep

Children are facing big challenges, especially as their parents are going through difficult times with the country's austerity situation. A lot of unabled and unemployed adolescents and youth are giving rise to newborns. Employment is at its lowest rate.

South Africa

Patsy Pilay, National Rep

Happy to report from 2015-2016 positive policy changes: ECD policy gazetted new national curriculum (NCF) for children under five years. Nutritional Guidelines for ECD centres introduced career path for ECD practitioners enhanced — in March this year, first Dip, Degree for ECD will be gazetted. Challenge is access to funding and funding from government. Whilst we have the positive policy changes, the implementation is slow and will take some time.

Tanzania

Josephine Ferla, Global Leader

The majority of children do not meet their developmental potential.

Tanzania

Fortidas R Bakuza, IAG, Global Leader, National Rep

Tanzania is witnessing some developments in Early Years Education. In the last three years (2014–2016), there have been some considerable progress in early years. The New Education and Training Policy 2014 is making Early Childhood Education compulsory for all children from 3 years old to 5 years old. The policy was followed by the development of a new curriculum and syllabus for ECE in 2015 referred to as Pre-Primary education in Tanzania. In January 2017, all Pre-Primary teachers received the training on the implementation of the new curriculum. This is the first time the government of Tanzania has demonstrated its commitment to all teachers who teach at this level. Other stakeholders such as Non-Governmental Organizations and Development Partners are supporting the government initiatives through teacher professional development programs. Training opportunities are also increasing in number with public and private teachers' training colleges and universities now offering courses in Early Childhood. It is expected that the momentum will continue and that the government will increase the budget for teacher recruitment, resources, and in-service training.

United Arab Emirates

Eman Gaad, National Rep

Children are relatively looked after. Emiratis have access to free early childhood education. Expats can access private ones. Primary health care is offered to all children and vaccinations are free. Inclusion of young learners with Special Education Needs (SEN)

is now required by law. All in all, services are improving.

Zimbabwe

Patrick Makokoro, Global Leader,
National Rep

Debilitating economic hardship in the country poses a challenge on retention of children within the school system and this will be worsened by food insecurity, which will see a huge number of children mostly in poor rural areas failing to attend school on a continuous basis due to hunger or in most cases having to provide labour in farms in exchange for food or financial incentives. Serious and considerable education sector financing in Zimbabwe still needs to be done, particularly when it comes to school infrastructure such as construction of new classroom blocks, electrification of rural schools, investments in ICT in both rural and urban schools, increased support in the provision of learning materials such as appropriate textbooks and other teaching aids. In addition to the infrastructure requirements, considerable investments by the government through adequate budgetary allocation to education and partnership with civil society organisations, it will be important to invest in teacher training colleges to ensure that there is adequate human resources that will cater for the growing education needs of the population. Equally important is the need to ensure that there are more Early Childhood Development (ECD) teachers trained and deployed to the primary schools to support the education ministry's policy to ensure that there is quality provision of services for young children. Young children remain at risk of failing to access education and supportive services in Zimbabwe if a deliberate attempt is not made to increase expenditure in early childhood development and other social services.

The Americas

Argentina

Carmen Hernaez, National Rep

In 2015, Argentina commemorated the 25th anniversary of the UNCRC, as well as its 10-year-old 26.061/2005 law that refers to the integral protection of rights for children under 18 years. This law, adjusted to the regulations of the Convention, overcame 90 years of child patronage and other irregular situations. Since 26.061 passed, legislative reforms have expanded childhood rights: the universal allowance per child for social protection, communication rights for childhood, criminal law prohibiting child labor. Other rights include gender identity, obligatory early childhood education for four-year-olds, and breastfeeding promotion, all implemented at the national and provincial levels. Since the approval of the National Education Law (26.206/2006), early school education has been established as a pedagogical unit serving children from 45 days old to five-years-old. This led to a 24.2% increase in enrollment in 2011-2013, almost 100% attendance of three- and four-year-old children. In Argentina, according to a recent report by UNICEF, 34.4% of children under five years are multi-dimensionally poor. In addition, almost 70% of children of that age do not have access to educational and care services, and this varies strongly in each social group and region of the country. In spite of the great advance that has been the public policy of the Universal Assignment per Child, it is estimated that there are 1.5 million children who are not yet covered by the AUH, although they should be by regulation. The current government has placed an important focus on early childhood, but it needs a more comprehensive public policy with an integral approach. In March 2016, the National Government launched the National Early Childhood Plan, with the aim of promoting child care initiatives. The main initia-

tive, under this National Plan, has been the establishment of early childhood centers on a national scale. Promoted by the Ministry of Social Development of the Nation, it plans to inaugurate four thousand child care centers (Centros de Primera Infancia CPIs) throughout the country for the next four years, focusing on the most vulnerable areas. The program has a budget of 1 billion pesos per year, financed by the IDB. The Early Childhood Centers program began in 2009 in the city of Buenos Aires. The CPIs arose from community and social organizations that were already working in the care of children of their communities, most of them in vulnerable areas. Argentina Early Childhood referents expressed that we need a more comprehensive policy on Early Childhood. As there is a marked heterogeneity in the entities that manage the CPIs, it is necessary to have a definition of clear quality standards and an adequate monitoring and supervision of them. Most of them are not within the frame of a curricular design, and in many cases there are no teachers with the corresponding accreditation to carry out these functions. One topic that needs to be reviewed is the articulation with the Ministries of Health, Labor, and Education. UNICEF, as well as different specialists, social organizations, and legislators believe that the lack of trained and specialized human resources in the care of young children in different regions of the country, and the low density of social organizations with which to work with, in an articulated way, is one of the main challenges. They are not easily replicable in the rest of the country. If the plan focuses only on building them, we run the risk of missing out on what is most important: the level of professionalized human resources in early childhood.

Brazil

Maria Thereza Marcilio, Global Leader

Although Brasil has made significant progress in recognizing the importance

of ECCE, with strong legislation and good public policies, our present political and economical crisis poses serious doubts about the continuity of these efforts which were showing improvement in the lives of young children and their families.

Canada

Glory Ressler, National Rep

In Canada, we have had some success, but there is still work to do to address inequities in opportunities for young children — especially with regard to issues experienced due to poverty or family trauma, and with visible minorities, children with unique needs, and our Indigenous communities. Efforts are being made across the country, and at all levels of the system, to increase access to quality programs and services for all our young children. However, there is no comprehensive plan to ensure that every young child has equal access at this time. Therefore, if all is implemented as currently planned, the impact will be moderate for all young children and dramatic for some young children in Canada.

Canada

Ron Blatz, IAG

Our Canadian politicians generally get the importance of the Early Years investments. They know the long-term benefits for the country. However, due to the fact that children don't vote and many young parents do not vote either, coupled with a four year re-election cycle, it is difficult to justify spending money on young children when it might result in less services for adults. So the journey to "doing the right thing" for children is a long one and the progress will likely be much slower than we as child advocates would hope for.

Colombia

Marissa Uribe, National Rep,
Global Leader

Colombia's new Children's State Policy "De Cero a Siempre" guarantees that children from 0 to 5 years of age, in vulnerable condition, have guaranteed care by the State that will allocate the necessary resources to fulfill this objective, as well as resources from the public, private, civil society and international cooperation sectors. For the first time in the country, early childhood is placed in the first rank as a priority population for the State. At the start, Cero a Siempre will benefit and guarantee the rights of 1,200,000 children in extreme poverty and then offer comprehensive care to another 2,875,000 of the most needy strata of the Colombian population. The care provided to these children includes health (including pre-natal supervision), nutrition, ECE, basic care, and family training. Cero a Siempre went from serving 350,000 children in 2010 to 1,200,000 in 2015.

Haiti

Caroline Hudicourt, National Rep, IAG

Very poor outlook. Children will not flourish while the physical and social environment has been crumbling.

Jamaica

Ceceile Minott, National Rep

In Jamaica we have a number of agencies, both government and non-government, that are working with children and adults to try and make the country a safe place for our children. The children are positive about what they want as they become adults and need our help to ensure that they get there. I also have a positive outlook as the agencies come together to work on the future of our children.

México

Ivan Galindo, Global Leader,
National Rep

In México, we have contradictory trends. On the one hand, we have had an Educational Reform for the last three years that has helped to improve some programs for young children and the quality of teachers. Also we have more investment in schools and that capacity has expanded. On the other hand, we expect very difficult economic times for the country over the next two years. This means that the optimistic expectations have curved down. Therefore, I think the goal now is just to keep whatever advances we have made and real improvement may have to wait for two years at least. México already has universal education for four- and five-year-old children and is guaranteed as a constitutional right. Nevertheless, full coverage is not achieved yet, but is more than 80% in urban settings. Quality of service from a developmentally appropriate practice has to be improved.

México

Connie Duran Robertson,
Global Leader

I see Mexican children in poverty have no opportunity due to the quality of public education. They will not be able to have a brighter future. Children that attend private schools, which are the minority, have a better chance. México truly needs to reform education and seek new union leaders that are aware of the difference education will make in our country and that are not seeking their own benefits.

Paraguay

Maria Burt, National Rep

According to UNICEF Paraguay, despite the progress made in recent years, indicators of child poverty are alarming. Thirty-three percent of children and adolescents live in this situation — about

760,000 of them — of which 49% are in extreme poverty, suffering serious deficiencies in food, health, and education. Among Indigenous children, it is even more alarming, since poverty affects 77% of them. Even though the reality of our country is grim, we hope to change the way children are viewed by the society and politicians. We would like to see a greater investment in our children and provide them their fundamental rights. Investing in children is investing in human development, creating a united society and a strong economy, effectively including this age group on which our future depends.

Peru

Martha Llanos, National Rep

The current decade shows an increasing interest in issues related to the total well-being of children. It is considered that all strong advocacies done for the last 30 years are finally shaping the increase in budget for education, health, and protection. During 2016 we celebrated the 85th anniversary of early childhood education in Peru (celebration relates to the date the first kindergarten was opened). Currently there are 86% of children between 3 to 5 years of age with access to ECD services. There has been incremental change in the access of children in rural areas that always showed lower levels and especially in the access of small girls now that disparity has been harmonized. There has been an incremental change in the number of teachers, with 20,000 more preschool teachers from 2015 to 2016. The early childhood budget has been increased. The new government since July 2016 has offered to continue emphasis on this age group from 0 to 5 and focus on the quality of services and also on the nutritional aspects, since levels continue to be a problem especially in rural areas. Currently, an alarming law was presented by the Congress reducing the age of children to enter into first grade for a child of

almost 5 and half years; there has been a response from all different institutions in the country, the academia, OMEP, and others. Representatives of the World Forum also raised the concern that this could not be permitted, and now the law is under review at the executive level (Presidential and ministerial level).

United States

Kim Nall, Global Leader

Unfortunately, with the election of a new and different president in the U.S., we have a lot of unknowns. We had made great strides in early care and education under the Obama administration. I fear that under the Trump administration we may take many steps backwards. I hope I am proven wrong. There is still a need to address poverty and lack of high-quality child care and early care and education for our poorest children in this country. We also have a great inequity in quality of child care options for families. There is new legislation that was passed addressing health and safety under federally- and state-funded programs; however, we still need an implementation plan — and there isn't any new funding attached to the policies — or at least any new adequate funding. We have a tremendous need to address maternal and infant/child mental health services, as well as mental health consultation for early care and education programs. On the bright side, there seems to be an emphasis on increasing health and safety standards in care, as well as teacher competencies for our teachers and caregivers. There continue to be efforts such as the Early Head Start — Child Care Partnerships, which strive to increase the quality of care for children ages 0–3, as well as close the gap between Early Head Start and Child Care program provisions. I continue to have great hope that our country will

invest in early care and education and find ways to improve services.

United States

Jennifer McGowan, Global Leader

Over the past eight years Early Childhood Education in the United States has seen much growth financially as well as in the services that are provided. In 2010, the Early Learning Interagency Policy Board (IPB) was established in order to bring together government agencies that play a role in early childhood learning including: the Department of Education, Health and Human Services, U.S. Departments of Defense, Agriculture, and Interior (Bureau of Indian Education). These agencies have been able to provide joint policy guidance and statements, and expert research studies to states and local communities on critical early learning issues. Additionally, federal funding sources and programs for Early Childhood Education programs have been combined and streamlined to provide continuity of care across programs. It is our hope that the next administration will continue the work of quality improvement for Early Childhood Education.

United States

Monica Sayad, Global Leader

There are opportunities and processes available for families. I have great concern for children in the foster care system. I am not optimistic for improvements on their behalf.

United States

Shefali Pai-Samant, IAG

It depends on the socio-economic group of children. In general, American children have a lot of opportunities, but unfortunately are overcommitted and stressed. Free play and independent socialization are limited.

The education system is not preparing children for the global economy.

Uruguay

Magela Guimeras, National Rep

Many improvements have been achieved related to health and early care, but education is an issue that still needs lot of efforts. This is a claim from parents, educators, and politicians but we haven't found yet a solution that everyone accepts. This means a real national program facing children and family needs in order to achieve better results. Private and public efforts must focus on this really significant issue. Education allows healthy children to become whatever they want to be, in a well-cared for environment, supported by educators who respect each other. We are building in this way a free and democratic society. Young children need the commitment of politicians, educators, and families to really make EDUCATION happen every day, everywhere in a real close future.

