**Education Support Program Portfolio Review (17th March 2014):**

**The Grassroots Organising and Social Mobilization Orientation in ESP’s Work.**

The core focus of ESP’s approved strategy is to make the right to education meaningful. This means ensuring, in both law and practice, access to a quality education through which teachers and schools are able to support every child, regardless of their background or needs, to develop the skills and dispositions necessary to thrive in our globalized world and be active citizens in their society. Ideas about quality in education are subjectively experienced and contextually bound but also influenced by debates at the local, national and global levels. Often, these ideas and the tensions they generate are reflected in national standards, the governance and structure of education provision, and in internationally comparable benchmarks in education. In order for the right to education to be fully realized, education systems (at the level of communities, schools and families) must embody the values of inclusiveness, fairness and openness, and participation.

**Defining the Portfolio Parameters**

The central focus for this portfolio review is our dedicated concept: mobilizing grassroots for education change. The portfolio also includes three smaller grants, in support of the field, to organizations working to further the right to education through social mobilization and grassroots work. Grants in this portfolio may also be classified along thematic and geographic lines. This portfolio focuses on our grants in the Europe/Eurasia region, all of which address the need to make local voices and debates explicit in national, regional, and global discussions through social mobilization at the grassroots level. As the grants in this portfolio encourage mutual support and solidarity among marginalized groups, we exclude several grantees doing work in the area of right to education from this review. These are the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) and their major affiliated regional bodies the African Network Campaign on Education For All (ANECFA), Asia Pacific Bureau for the Advancement of Education (ASPBAE) and *Campaña Latinoamericana por el Derecho a la Educación* (CLADE) and the newly formed Arab Coalition for Education for All (ACEA). The reason is that these organizations focus on advocacy upward rather than organisation downward; we therefore provide limited and targeted funding for their advocacy only when it fits our priorities. We also exclude from this portfolio Education International which has a strong grassroots base, because our work with them is focused on the global architecture of education aid and policy.

This portfolio of grants represents different political opportunities and modes of civil activism through network building as a specific strategic method. We will discuss the ways that grassroots involvement and social mobilisation around education can develop strategies that strengthen horizontal collaboration, support networks, policy voice at national level, and shared advocacy around the right to education. These grants thus illustrate solidarity *in action* rather than *in aspiration*. Through this portfolio review, we hope to gain deeper insights into what ESP and OSF can learn from our various efforts; what success looks like; and how we might effectively transfer what is working from this experience without developing a cookie-cutter approach.

**Placing the Portfolio in Its Wider Context**

The wider landscape of grassroots mobilization for education change has been characterized by a high degree of political direct action. For instance, the last decade has seen a marked increase in social mobilisation and anti-austerity protest action seeking to defend education as a public good and to demand an improved quality of education services. Illustrative highlights include: the Penguin Revolution in Chile in 2006; the Winter Rose Revolution by students in Budapest in 2012 against Orban’s reforms; protests in defence of public education in Germany in 2009; the 2011-13 Chilean protests in rejection of neoliberal education policies; the 3-day nation-wide strike in Spain by students, teachers and parents in October 2013; Equal Education’s court victory to force the minister to produce norms and standards for South African schools in November 2013; the successful action by pupils and teachers in Gabon against unfair exam reform in December 2013, and; the yearly recurring occupation of schools in Buenos Aires over curricular reform. The slogans of these movements range from “We won’t pay for your crisis!”, in the protests against the Gelmini decree in Italy in 2008, to “Never again fascism!” in students’ Athens march in November 2013 to commemorate 40 years since the fall of Greek dictatorship.

ESP has been involved with two of these movements which warrant brief mention here despite being outside the focal geographic region of Europe/Eurasia. In South Africa, the membership based-student organisation Equal Education (EE), based in South African townships, initially in the Western Cape but with increasing presence in the Eastern Cape, Gauteng and Limpopo, is an increasingly significant shaper of opinion and reforms on education. Working with an important set of public interest law firms, committed to human rights, that have roots in South Africa’s traditions of solidarity and social justice, EE deliberately mobilizes civil society through strategically engaging the country’s robust legal system to achieve modest but significant advances. The student movement in Chile inspired numerous off shoots such as our grantee Proyecto Propio, through which we fund an initiative to promote cross-party dialogue to keep education issues to the fore. The work of this grantee similarly taps deep traditions of social mobilisation to give expression to deep-rooted dissatisfaction with an expensive, exclusionary education system. The policy position of the newly elected government, as a result, is broadly shaped by priorities set in this citizens’ movement and now faces the hard test of realising in practice an education system that is fair and just.

By contrast to the political direct action focus of these social movements, most of the grants in this review as well as the related grassroots work of other OSF programs and foundations in the Europe/Eurasia region, focus on development. The Early Childhood Program has an active portfolio of grants that focus at community-level. The Xenophobia Fund consults regularly on applications for grants and we co-fund a grant to Critical Mass Foundation in the Netherlands. At Home in Europe has a consistent orientation to what is happening at the grassroots in the research it funds. And there is also a welcome, but still modest new focus on community organizing in support of the DH verdict in the Czech Republic by the Justice Initiative to support Roma parents in enrolling their children in mainstream schools. It will be important to continue support for keeping these children in school safely and successfully. Also, over the past two years and continuing in 2014, ESP provides funds to Nadace Open Society Fund Praha to support their planning at the regional and municipal level for a transition to more inclusive education practices. This involves the active participation of civil society as well as local education authorities.

The wider landscape for this portfolio also includes comparable organisations that we do not fund in the Europe/Eurasia region. Many European education networks derive their legitimacy from their ability to secure public sector funding through various European structural funding programmes. Given that most of the large networks, such as the European Voluntary Service, and others on **List 4 of Annex A**, are actually government-funded projects, their mission is to work towards delivering the policy objectives of the European integration process. These networks undertake crucially important services and functions, such as pupil mobility, or cross-country voluntarism. However, they generally have very limited scope in generating policy analysis and other policy work at local or community level, and to feed it back to the general policy-making process. For instance, none of the educational networks in Europe raised any concerns related to violation of European data-transparency legislation by the Comenius Programme for school education.

The Comenius Programme, which covers all education arrangements from pre-primary to secondary, has been allocated €1.2 billion between 2007 and 2013. Available data suggest the programme is strongly biased against schools that service vulnerable, marginalised or hard-to-reach communities. The present Comenius Programme mechanism has failed to coordinate national agencies and to produce systematically collected and readily available administrative data so that future policy can be better crafted. Hidden assumptions, that rural and urban schools do not have different needs, for example, create disadvantages for the already disadvantaged. ESP’s preferred approach is to work with community groups to ask these questions and pose them to public sector run programmes.

**Grants under Review in this Portfolio**

Our concept, Mobilizing the Grassroots for Education Change, includes two grassroots initiatives in Europe and the Caucasus that are aimed at furthering education inclusion for marginalized children and building solidarity among marginalized groups, including minorities and children with disabilities. The concept aims to combine the efforts of smaller organizations in joint project to increase their confidence, credibility, policy influence and social voice. Both initiatives develop advocacy towards the EU, other regional bodies, and national governments, aimed at implementing policies that protect the right to education for vulnerable children.

The portfolio review also includes three grants in the field where the impetus did not originate from ESP: the Association of Parents of Disabled Children in Tajikistan, which is a movement of young mothers to get their disabled children enrolled in regular schools; the Integrated Education Fund, a 20 year old Northern Ireland movement of determined parents , who reject a sectarian education for their children in favour of an inclusive integrated model; and the Nansen Dialogue Centre, which is committed to establishing a combined Catholic Croat / Serbian Orthodox school in Vukovar, Croatia. The first two of these are exemplary national movements, which are included in the portfolio because they demonstrate enormous resolve and great ingenuity. The integrated school in Vukovar is a small community initiative that illuminates important lessons about hope and courage.

**The Caucasus Network for Children**

The Caucasus Network for Children (CNC) is a regional platform of 15 grassroots organizations that came together in a network in 2013. We have provided funding to individual organizations in the network since 2008 when we identified them through an open call for proposals. We launched this call in hopes of uniting activists and professionals working in education across the Caucasus to transcend the political conflicts and complexities of the region through a commitment to peace, inclusion and the next generation. Each coalition member is a well-established organization in their country that deals with different groups of vulnerable children that are excluded from the mainstream education system. ESP brought these grantees together to build capacity around their original project ideas and create space for them to work together by funding consortium projects and by supporting the development of an initially informal network, which was formalised in early 2013.

The network aims to provide a voice for the education needs of children with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and children-affected-by-conflict. ESP will continue to support this coalition in its efforts to become an independent regional platform for advocacy and good practice in inclusive education. As members of a single regional network, they see the value of joint work for exchanging models of good practice and holding governments and donors accountable for implementing inclusive education. In 2013, ESP focused primarily on supporting the needs of the newly established network that had before it the task to work out its governing structures, by-laws, grant policy and other documents, as well as providing grant support for the activities essential for the involved NGOs before their network becomes strong enough to seek external funding to support network projects.

The value in this work, in our view, stems from two specific commitments to solidarity. First, it is extremely difficult to develop regional work in the Caucasus because of the political divisions and frozen conflicts in the region. This has been challenging for CNC members who have all demonstrated great diplomacy in keeping politics out of their discussions while still addressing issues of policy and incredible creativity in overcoming the practical difficulties created by sudden changes in visa regimes, and travel restrictions, for instance. Second, CNC members represent several constituencies that seldom work together. It is not unusual for organizations representing children with a specific disability, a specific ethnic or language group, or NGOs focused on children affected by conflict to come together into networks. However, it is very rare for these organizations to cross the borders of their constituencies to advocate for the inclusion of all vulnerable children in education. The CNC has achieved both.

Although we think they will still need ESP support on a sliding scale for several years, we expect the CNC to become a strong regional network able to start relatively independent activities as early as mid-2014. In 2014, ESP is providing grant support on a reduced level to assist CNC in transforming itself into an independent regional platform for advocacy and good practice in inclusive education. In our approach, we used the tools of convening joint meetings and workshops, facilitating discussion on common approaches and joint projects, identifying needs and providing technical assistance and making available international and regional expertise. The main feature of our approach has been identifying needs, creating conditions for the grantees to take the initiative, and making space for voices from the ground.

**Caucasus Network for Children**

**Funding at a Glance**

**Total (November 2010- December 2013):** $2,328,308, with €184,400 from the Austrian Development Agency

**Total open grants:** $365,217

1-Society Biliki, Georgia: $31,784

2-Civil Development Institute, Georgia: $28,381

3-Umid SSD, Azerbaijan: $27,775

4-Dialogue International Association,

Hungary sub-granting to North Caucasus: $39,913

5- Bridge of Hope, Armenia: $23,364

6-Interkulturelles Zentrum, Austria: $214,000

**Planned for 2014**: $100,000 in grants and $50,000 in technical assistance

In the rather short history of the network’s development, there have been rapid advances and temporary setbacks. In the very initial stages of its existence, the CNC members worked hard to come to consensus around important issues of governance. There were several points where the network could have fallen into conflict, but in each instance the members acted with responsibility, fairness, and transparency. The group has shown openness and discretion working out internal challenges and they have experience in implementing joint projects. We recognise the political risks and struggle to raise sustainable finance associated with this network. However, we will work alongside them to ensure they become a strong, independent, and sustainable coalition over the next two years.

We have also found fundraising to be a challenge in the Caucasus. Opportunities for funding on a regional basis are scarce, as grant giving policy of different donors often reinforces the divides. In both 2012 and 2013, the CNC has worked with the Interkulturelles Zentrum (IZ), a long-time OSF partner in Europe, to raise funds from the Austrian Development Agency. This has been successful in terms of providing funding for activities (€84,400 in 2011-12; €100,000 in 2012-13), which include a children’s media and advocacy project in the region, meetings and other activities to support the formation of a network. However, we had also hoped that this relationship would lead to an advocacy platform with the European Union through the Eastern Partnership process, which has not emerged. External factors form the basis for this difficulty, in particular the lack of coordination and communication among EU Delegations in the South Caucasus. Further, IZ has also been unable to formulate the strategic response that we had hoped they would provide.

**Grassroots Europe**

In Europe, ESP is building on the outcomes of the Grassroots Europe Initiative launched in 2011. This initiative jointly funded with the EU created a network of more than 200 education and social inclusion-related grassroots organizations and was recognized as a model EU project. These organizations based in Albania, Austria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia and Romania advocate for access to and support in education for minority and marginalized communities. ESP has served the role of linking these grassroots partners on the edge of activism, transformational pedagogy and evidence-based research, to create a more inclusive constituency pushing for policy change. ESP’s development of this network also advances our work on education financing, as the network presses to ensure that EU rhetoric around access and inclusion translates into national policies and monitoring mechanisms for adequate resourcing and effective implementation.

Since 2011, ESP has engaged with this constituency of over 200 grassroots organizations working with vulnerable children and youth in the eight countries listed above. During these first three years of the initiative we have gradually built up and tested a set of support tools as a means of empowering the grassroots network. These tools included fundraising support; small grant schemes; convening grassroots networks and education stakeholders; technical assistance; evidence generation; documentation of partnership project experiences; and advocacy support. Each of these tools has met with varying degrees of success, setbacks and learning that we have since incorporated into our approach and successive strategic decisions. The impact of organizing this network is evident in: the increased ability to secure and channel EU funds towards less well-established and smaller grassroots groups; and the opening up of access to EU policy space for these less well-established and smaller grassroots groups.

The current EU funding mechanism prioritizes and strengthens larger, well-established civil society players, whose interest, or effect, is the maintenance of the status quo and crowding out of smaller constituency-based grassroots groups in the competition for funds. Our experience as lead partners in the implementation of the two EU grants this project has received has brought about important learning and some challenges.

Some of our partners have adopted a more empowering approach towards grassroots civil society players that otherwise would not be able to access EU funds. For instance, the Public Policy Center in Romania attracted $145,990 from the Romanian Structural Funds to implement a 6-module accredited civil society capacity-building training for 20 representatives of 6 Romanian grassroots organizations with ESP co-financing in 2013. By contrast, some partners have been more opportunistic in their engagement with the network and we have discontinued work with three of these as a result (Agora CE, Interkulturelles Zentrum, LIFE).

The process of securing EU funding is highly competitive and so we have not always met with success in our efforts to leverage EU funding in partnership with members of the grassroots network. For instance, in 2012 we were unsuccessful in our applications for four grassroots partnership projects announced through an EACEA call totalling € 659,585. However, the process of developing projects and completing applications in response to the EACEA call provided important capacity-building opportunities for participating grassroots organizations.

**Grassroots Europe at a Glance**

**2012:** $120,678 distributed to 9 partnership projects implemented by 48 grassroots organizations in 5 countries

**2013:** $105, 682 distributed for 9 partnership projects implemented by 62 organizations from 8 countries

**2014:** $161,044 to be distributed to 8 partnership projects in 5 countries to be implemented by 56 grassroots organizations in collaboration with 46 schools in marginalized communities.

**Total grants for Grassroots Europe in 2011-2013**: $1.3 million with $700,000 financed by the EU.

**Total planned for Grassroots Europe in 2014**: $359,193

This capacity-building element is also highlighted in ESP’s facilitation and support of project development and fundraising efforts of grassroots networks. For instance, ESP’s participation in a donor coordination meeting organized by OSIFE Hungary in 2013 with the representatives of the Norway Grants facilitated the advisement and mentoring of the Hungarian grassroots network in their project development efforts. As a result, four grassroots organizations successfully applied for €30,000 in micro-grants. Additionally, growing out from the pilot project tested within the grassroots small grant scheme funded in 2012 by ESP, the NGO Foundation for Democratic Youth has managed to successfully apply for a macro-grant of additional $196,691 for a 2-year Norway Grant project to be implemented by an extended partnership of 15 grassroots organizations.

Based on our 2011 experience of implementing an EU-funded project, and realizing that the rigidity of the EU grant structure limits the type of funding to mostly meetings and international cooperation, ESP has decided to complement these funds with more flexible funding tools adaptable to grassroots needs. Our successive experience demonstrated that this flexible small grant scheme is a very successful tool capable of generating meaningful and sustainable local partnerships and empowering grassroots organizations. The micro-project grant scheme has proven to be the central mechanism for integrating real grassroots actions and on-the-ground collaboration into the framework of EU-funded projects. Consequently, we have decided to maintain and improve this tool, based on the feedback of grassroots partners.

As a result of our sustained efforts in this area, we are now able, in 2014, to reduce our support to some of the implementing partners that have successfully taken ownership of the strategic approach developed through our engagement and acquired increased capacity to secure funding in the support of their grassroots network. Accordingly, our 2014 budget includes significantly downsized project support grants to some organizations, with additional funds available to co-fund their potential third party fundraising efforts. ESP plans to maintain the scale of ESP engagement with partners in Albania, Hungary and Croatia as they (Children of the Future, Motivacio, Forum for Freedom in Education) need continuing support to capitalize on the momentum of the contextual changes that have led to three emerging advocacy strategies of their grassroots network, namely:

**In Albania**, the new law on pre-university education offers an opportunity to strengthen democratic processes and increased transparency in the education sector, granting new roles to parents and teachers in the appointment of school principals and overview of school budgets. OSFA Albania plans to monitor and advocate for the proper implementation of these new provisions, supporting parents association to secure fair and democratic elections for school parent councils and school boards. To back this process, ESP’s local partner (Children are the Future) and its grassroots network will provide the outreach to parents and teachers of marginalized rural communities, and will conduct empowerment and capacity-building activities, linking these communities to the monitoring and advocacy activities planned by the Foundation.

**In Hungary,** growing out of discussions within the Hungarian grassroots group, an advocacy platform has begun crystallizing around the recent distribution of $8 million of EU funds to Tanodas (extracurricular after- and out-of-school study halls supporting disadvantaged, mainly Roma, children) and upcoming consultations on the 2014-2020 EU financial cycle. With additional ESP funds, one of the grassroots organizations (Motivation Association) has taken the lead in bringing together the representatives of Tanodas in a strong professional network capable of informing policy decisions on how EU funds can be efficiently spent on education support programs with the long-term prospect of reforming mainstream education.

**In Croatia,** the introduction of compulsory civic education into the national curriculum will likely be opposed by right-wing forces and potentially increase intolerance and homophobic attitudes in public discourse (as was the case during the 2012 introduction of health education into the curriculum). ESP’s main partner, Forum for Freedom of Education, along with other major NGO players and the grassroots network aims to establish an awareness raising campaign to counter these potential negative trends and campaign for the importance of civic education and active civic participation.

**The Association of Parents of Children with Disabilities, APDC (Tajikistan)**

Parents of children with disabilities have a particularly reduced agency regarding their children’s rights, including access to health and education services, through both formal and informal opportunity structures. Mainstream schools are not designed to work inclusively with children with disabilities or other special education needs. Informally, Tajik cultural norms place shame and stigma on families of children with disability.

ESP and OSI Tajikistan have been supporting the development of a coalition of associations of parents of children with disabilities since 2009. The coalition began with an initiative group set up by the NGO “Zdorovye,” (health in Russian) to help parents of children with disabilities support each other emotionally and practically as they navigated the systems of education, health, and social services with their children. The group grew quickly and began supporting like-minded NGOs and initiative groups in other parts of Tajikistan outside the capital.

Currently, the network has grown to encompass 25 affiliates ranging in structure from registered NGOs to informal initiative groups. A survey of the network that ESP conducted in November, 2013 showed that the vast majority are legally registered with the Ministry of Justice and have been operating formally for an average of 2.92 years with more than 2,100 members across the country. Most organizations are small with an average of between 7 and 8 staff supplemented by volunteers and active members. Many of the associations also have access to specialist knowledge within their staff, although this was also an area where several respondents indicated a significant need. There is also need for significantly better coordination among donors and improved governance structures for the coalition as a network if they are to become an effective group at the national level. This is a brewing weakness in the network that we are well-placed to address in 2014.

To support this work, we have used a combination of convening meetings, technical assistance for organizational development, and direct grant funding. For example, we have provided small grants to potential international partners like Down Syndrome International ($9,000) to provide specific training and to make contact with the Coalition as a whole. We have also relied on OSI Tajikistan to provide leadership in policy advocacy and donor coordination. This has been successful to varying degrees with the foundation confronting challenges as they arise.

**The Integrated Education Fund, IEF (Northern Ireland)**

Despite being a community foundation that is over 20 years old, Integrated Education Fund (IEF) is very much community-based. It responds to the demands of parents who want non-sectarian education for their children and involves them very intensively in the set up and management of integrated schools. Salaries and all refurbishing and building costs have to be found by the community as there is negligible support from the state for the first two operational years of a new school. Since its inception as a foundation in 1992, IEF has raised total funds of £27.772 million. There are currently 62 formal integrated schools (42 at Primary and 20 at Post Primary/Colleges). In addition there are a number of integrated pre-schools and nurseries which IEF has helped to establish. These formal integrated schools are now more than two years old and therefore receive government funding. With an annual budget of about £1 million IEF continues to support a number of schools every year with development and expansion costs to meet parental demand.

IEF’s vision is to achieve a tipping point in public opinion by securing enough support for integrated education to become mainstreamed. While ESP’s financial engagement with IEF is very modest, our primary concern is to link IEF to other work in Europe, including for instance The New School Project in Vukovar. Following the communal violence in Belfast against Roma in 2010, the IEF schools were the first to open their doors to open Roma children. They are thus a natural partner for the Open Society Foundations and will continue to be an important strategic partnership for ESP.

**The New School Project (Vukovar, Croatia)**

As as a response to ethnically segregated schools in Eastern Croatia, Nansen Dialogue Center has been working on establishing an integrated school in Vukovar, as a precondition for the gradual integration of the whole community. ESP funds supported the methodological preparations as well as a series of preparatory stakeholder meeetings to pave the way for the sustainability of this model project. Currently The New School Project is being developed into a final project proposal for third party funding, having already secured pre-approval from the European Economic Area and Norway Grants and the support of the Serbian National Council and two Ministries. ESP's ongoing support in 2014 is justified by worrying ethnic tensions in the region and the fragile political agreement around the school's establishment and aims to mitigate these risks.

**Related ESP Grants**

ESP works with several partners who also take a grassroots approach to social mobilization around education issues. Most of these are included in the Fields section of our strategy because the impetus for their work with grassroots groups, coalitions, or stakeholders has not come from us. They have organized independently and are often well-established organizations moving forward issues that we believe are essential to our strategy and the field using a strategic method that we support.  Some of these, in addition to Proyecto Propio ($49,890) and Equal Education ($353,507 in 2013), include  the Eurasia Foundation of Central Asia's ($140,000) work with teachers and parents of children with disabilities in Kyrgyzstan, the Artemisszio Foundation ($11,800) for [support to schooling of young adults in refugee status](https://na14.salesforce.com/006d000000757bq" \t "_parent), institutional support to The Learning Trust ($100,000) for its work with grassroots education initiatives in South Africa, and funding for Perspektiva's ($100,000) ground-breaking litigation support for inclusive education and cultural advocacy for people with disabilities in Russia.

ESP also provides funding for projects that are not specifically grassroots in their approach but have the potential to amplify or reinforce the work of grassroots networks through research to build an evidence base, training or technical assistance, and creating conncetions to higher level policy work. For example, part of our work with the Albanian National Foundation and the Migration Policy Group for support to the Sirius Policy Project has helped us to work towards linking policy work to the grassroots activities in Europe. These initiatives lend us the policy perspective and presence at national and EU level policy discussions, providing us and our national foundation the opportunity to bring in grassroots voices into the policy processes. Other grants in this category include our support for inclusive education in Czech Republic with funding for Nadace Open Society Fund Praha ($100,161), and grants to support the Annual Status of Education Report through ITA Pakistan. Developed in 2004 by Pratham in India, the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) is a citizen-led tool to assess learning at primary level that builds the capacity of individuals and institutions to measure at scale and hold the state to account through year-on-year evidence for focused civil society campaigning. In 2008 ASER was replicated in Pakistan by ITA. In 2013 ASER covered 263,990 children from 87,044 households in 139 rural and 13 urban districts. Through the production of policy briefs, media campaigns and facilitated dialogues between government and civil society groups ASER is gaining significant traction with national and provincial government in Pakistan, informing policy debates and actions on the Right To Education (RTE) Article 25-A. It also provides unique information for tracking MDG/EFA trends and targets up to 2015 and is influencing national and international goal-setting debates for the Post-2015 agenda. See **List 2 of Annex A** for a listing of these grants.

**Relevant Grants by other OSF Programs**

A number of OSF programs and national foundations engage in grant making related to grassroots mobilization for education change in the Europe/Eurasia region. These OSF programs and national foundations include the Early Childhood Program (ECP), The Open Society Justice Initiative (OSJI), the Human Rights Initiative (HRI), OSIFE, TIFA Indonesia, and Foundation for Open Society-Pakistan. A listing of some of the most relevant grants is set out in **List 3 of Annex A**.

Several of these grants support parental and community engagement in advocating for education change. For instance, ECP has a cluster of engagements that support the empowerment of Roma parents for early childhood provision, including community-based pilot projects in Albania and the Czech Republic. The cluster also includes Roma parents’ projects in Slovakia, Slovenia, Macedonia, United Kingdom and Ukraine. The Fund to Counter Xenophobia also has a cluster of grants focused on community engagement. One of these is ‘Hope not Hate’ which provides support to selected community leaders from France, Hungary, Greece the Netherlands and Sweden to implement community-based campaigns that combat hatred and intolerance leading up the European Elections.

Another theme that defines this group of grants by other OSF programs and foundations is grants that elevate youth voices advocating for greater democracy and denouncing xenophobia. The support of the Youth Exchange for the ‘Foundation for Democratic Youth’ initiative provides one such example. This project based in Hungary, aims to support democratically-minded young people and respond to the rise in support for extreme, right-wing parties. The project also focuses on disadvantaged Roma youth in Hungary, and helps increase their awareness of their rights and their capacity to advocate for themselves and combat stereotypes.

A final main theme of this group of grants is the focus on education needs of children with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and children-affected-by-conflict. One example of these is the Arab Regional Office (ARO), through a grant from George Soros, is supporting the International Rescue Committee (IRC) ‘Children Cannot Wait’ programme that aims to provide quality education for Syrian refugee children in Lebanon through a rapid-response community school initiative in three selected districts, developing an inclusive curriculum and strengthening the quality of teacher training for both Syrian and Lebanese children over the longer term.

**Lessons the program is learning**

1 – Our working ‘conceptual concept’ is that current European policy, including its pro-poor policy, in fact deepens social marginalisation and has a weakening effect on civil society. This goes back further than the recent austerity measures and involves the general turn to market-oriented solutions in the public sector, centralisation and bureaucracy in Brussels and how these play out in national policies and politics. In education, the over €1billion Comenius program has had perverse selectivity effects that tend to exclude the schools and communities that need it most, and EU funding mechanism make it impossible for smaller community-based organisations responding to local but also national policies, to thrive. These developments are largely unchallenged and unnoticed. The Grassroots Europe project, the perseverance of the IEF in Northern Ireland and the aspirations of parents in Vukovar for non-segregated local school are natural partners for OSF and open society. We would like to broaden this conversation and this front of activities within OSF.

2 – We both support the general policy of decentralisation in education in that it places a necessary focus on local government, communities and parents – and oppose it in that decentralisation typically also reflects, at national level, the weakening of a commitment to the right to education and policy strengthening education as a general societal good. The growing nationalist populism we see in parts of Europe exploits decentralisation to extend exclusion and discrimination at local level wherever it can. Where these ideas dominate national politics, as in Hungary, exclusion can be rolled out nationally. The movement for an open society needs to be as much grassroots, bottom-up as it is high-level advocacy. The Tanoda movement in education in Hungary, for example, reflects the push-back that is possible as grassroots communities become more involved. We are able to undertake this only on a small scale and need to explore partnerships to extend this work.

3 – Our orientation to what is happening at a grassroots level thus needs to seek out social movements that may provide inspiration and momentum. Equal Education, Proyecto Propio and ASER, despite the specific challenges they face not addressed in this review, provide this for us. The relative strength and ambition of these organisations, of course, reflects a broader social momentum recently unseen in Europe until perhaps the current events in Ukraine. The grants in this portfolio explore how the slower, harder ground-work carried out by the APDC in Tajikistan, CNC in the Caucasus, Grassroots Europe and IEF in Northern Ireland can begin to build the networks and devise the methods to strengthen resilient social movements that share our ideals and which are needed to achieve and sustain open and just societies over the longer term.

4 – A commitment to including marginalised and hard-to-reach children requires a combination of focused research, policy-level advocacy, technical assistance as well as grassroots work. Grassroots work, however, intersects and brings together, within and approach that is more context-bound, work that OSF typically organises discretely: such as education inclusion for Roma through REF, the rights migrants to education through the Migration Project, minorities through At Home in Europe, the inclusion of disabled children through the Human Rights Initiative, and so on. We feel there is power and potential in the grassroots approach would benefit from a broader conversation and more co-ordinated action within OSF.

5 – This ideas are not adequately addressed within our current strategy. They stretch beyond the limits of our current approved concept on mobilising grassroots, which includes only Grassroots Europe and CNC. They provide a tension between the specific grants that are part of this portfolio review and the wider context in which they are located. We look forward to this discussion but are unsure about the implications for structuring our work to meet these challenges.

**The way forward**

1 – We have continually needed to find ways to focus the Grassroots Europe project, which built on earlier work of ESP to tap the energy of community-level education initiatives work in up to 15 countries, and included a glance toward Western Europe with its partners in Italy, Germany and Austria. We feel there needs to be a turn East, wherever we can in 2014 but decidedly in 2015, to four countries: Moldova where we are supporting mainly technical assistance to the new government but also have an idea for building a new social compact around education; Albania where there is also an OSF-friendly government, the foundation is a strong partner and where there is a strong legacy of education work (over $60 million spent on the Albanian Education Development Program and the schools communities protected during the Ponzi scheme riots in 1997); Hungary where the Tanoda movement provides a focal point for resisting the reactionary reforms of the incumbent government; and Ukraine where there is risk opportunity to capitalise on the civic consciousness that emerged at Maidan.

2 – We intend to maintain the steady work to build collaboration and solidarity across the Caucasus through the Caucasus Network for Children, and pay attention to strategies for sustainable funding over the longer term. The grants we provide are relatively small, but we know these organisations and their joint projects will be greatly strengthened if we are able to secure additional funding. The heightened tensions in the wider region may underline the significance of this work within the EU.

3 – We would like to explore a reciprocal emphasis on grassroots organisations in OSIFE’s work in Western Europe in countries such as Greece, Italy and the Netherlands, and with other programs such as ECP. We already have active collaboration with At Home in Europe and the Xenophobia Fund which could be strengthened by greater synergies in the overall strategic approach.

4 – This portfolio review reflects the wider narrative that plays out in all of our work: education is site that brings together, for large sections of the population, both their aspirations for their own children and shared ideas involving governance, society and civic responsibility. This encounter thus provides an opportunity for practicing democracy and learning about an open and just society.

**Annex A: List of Grants in this Portfolio Review, Related Grants and Non Grantees**

**Annex B: Media Coverage by Grants in the Portfolio Review and Related ESP Grants**