

ISSA Annual Report

2011



INTERNATIONAL
STEP by STEP
ASSOCIATION

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1. INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL OVERVIEW

Founded upon ISSA's vision and mission, the Strategy Framework for 2010-2012 identifies four strategic goals, which were developed in a way to ensure continuity and build upon ISSA's previous successes. These goals in the Strategy Framework are also closely aligned with priorities identified by ISSA's main donor, OSF, in their own strategy, as they continue to focus on promoting quality and equity in early childhood education in the region, building on the investments made by OSF in the CEE/CIS region. In order to promote the quality and sustainability of OSF's investment, ISSA provides Step by Step NGOs with means to deliver new high quality early childhood content, thus keeping their competitive edge in their countries as innovative organizations. The association also provides NGOs with a structure through which they can develop long-term regional and international early childhood collaborative partnerships, both within the network and with other organizations and potential donors.

ISSA's work during 2011 is guided by the **four Strategic Goals** of the 2010-2012 Strategy Framework:

- I. Promote access and equity of care and education for young children in the region
- II. Promote high quality/professionalism in providing care and education for young children
- III. Promote civil society participation, community-based ECDE, and parental education
- IV. Enhance the capacity of the ISSA network to deliver its strategy

Specific **network-wide priorities** in the 2011 Work Plan included:

A. Ensure that the ISSA network continues to be at the forefront of innovations:

- Support was offered to members to work with the recently finalized resources in ISSA's Resource Package for Quality Pedagogy and to enrich their expertise in developing professional learning communities by using the Package.
- Through new partnership projects, new resources were continuously developed and offered to members.

B. Support ISSA as a learning community:

- As a professional umbrella association, ISSA supported Special Interest Groups working through an Online Community and during in-person meetings, forming consortia to apply for grants for joint projects and to develop new resources.
- Thematic Meetings along with Member Exchanges and Technical Assistance were organized for ensuring shared understanding of quality pedagogy and support shared learning in different areas connected with the strategic goals.

C. Engage in activities which directly improve the lives of children and their chances for success in life:

- Through several initiatives ISSA implemented partnership projects *at country level*, in partnership with the member NGO and other stakeholders. Eventually the whole network benefits, when resources developed and lessons learnt in these projects are shared with all members.

These priorities were met through the following **operational mechanisms**:

- **Community Building:** promoting and sustaining values; linking its membership into a strong community around the ISSA Principles for Quality Pedagogy
- **Capacity Building:** generating new knowledge through collaborative initiatives; making new resources available and supporting their application in the network
- **Advocacy:** promoting the importance of investing in the quality of early years services
- **Convening and Network Representation:** partnership building; cooperation with other relevant networks; increasing visibility and credibility of the network and of individual members

2. MAIN ACTIVITIES FOR REACHING STRATEGIC GOALS

ISSA's work in 2011 was carried out within the framework of its Work Plan 2011, with three open grants from OSF and six grants/contracts from non-OSF sources. The Work Plan included a number of initiatives which had started in 2010, and were rolled over into 2011 (especially under Goal I and II).

Goal I - Promote access and equity of care and education for young children in the region

Overview of Progress under Goal I

The main focus of ISSA's work in this goal revolved around taking further ISSA's work in Education for Social Justice, by supporting members to use resources for supporting learning communities to translate ESJ principles into practice. In a number of partnership projects, ISSA was engaged in development of new resources, trainings and advocacy promoting access for Roma children to quality early education services.

Specific objectives:

- engage in partnership projects which directly improve lives of children and supports learning communities
- develop/disseminate new resources for the network and build capacity to use them

I.1. Second phase of the Education for Social Justice Project

In 2010 ISSA partnered with the Center for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP) in Serbia, which received an Innovative Grant from OSF to map and analyze the existing delivery and potential in the ISSA network to provide Education for Social Justice trainings, mentoring and support, as well as to map and summarize resources that are available from other providers regarding human rights education and social justice concepts in the region. Building upon the progress in this phase, a second phase started in 2011, with the aim to create a library of relevant resources and to support the creation of learning communities at national level to translate ESJ principles into practice. In the first half of the year, the partners in the project developed a library of resources, collecting relevant tools, articles, links and publications from outside the ISSA network, which promote the same values and principles, and which could be useful to members. These resources were posted on the ISSA Online Community in the Library section, in the area Inclusion, Diversity and Values of Democracy. A Special Interest Group focusing on *Social Inclusion* was created in order to share with interested members additional resources: activities and games which can be used in the classroom. This Group is also intended to be a vehicle for members to engage in discussion forums on topics related to Diversity and Social Inclusion. ISSA members were informed about the availability of these resources and invited to join this open group. There was a positive response, judging by the number of hits to download resources from the library, and by the number of members who joined the Social Inclusion Group.

A meeting was organized in October 2011 for the NGOs who have expressed interest in being partners in the next phase of the project, which aims to take the work to community and classroom level. An additional Group was established on the Online Community, specifically for the NGOs engaged in the project: *Making Values of Inclusion, Diversity and Democracy Alive in Educational Practice*. Following up on plans agreed during the October 2011 meeting, the group began their work to develop local campaigns to advocate for fair and inclusive environments for children through different platforms (social media, conferences, projects) and to connect teachers, schools, NGOs, and others involved in social justice work from different countries. The campaigns will include the development and dissemination of a catalogue of activities through which individuals, schools and communities promote social justice values and actions, as well as possible ways to use ESJ materials for trainings of different length with different target groups. The project will continue into 2012 and the results of their work will feed into the sub-strategy for the Education for Social Justice Program, which the ISSA Program Committee will draft.

Partner: CIP Serbia; Funder: OSF through an Innovative Grant to CIP

I.2. A Good Start Project -Coordination of Roma Integration Methods, Roma Pilot Project

Given ISSA's strong expertise in the field of Quality ECD and Roma Education, the invitation from Roma Education Fund to join a partnership project was pursued in 2010 within the *A Good Start* project, an EU DG Regio-funded project coordinated by Roma Education Fund, which started in June 2010 and will end in June 2012. The project is implemented in 16 communities from Macedonia, Romania, Hungary, and Slovakia. Within this project, ISSA's contribution focuses on providing capacity building for the human resources involved in the implementation of the project around quality practices in inclusive learning environments, as well as building social justice in the selected communities. In order to build on the high expertise of ISSA member NGOs in the four countries, they were hired as consultants in the project and provided trainings to teachers, Roma mediators and other professionals working in community centers set up in the project. Most of the trainings were completed in 2010 and some took place also in the first half of 2011. There are still activities postponed because of how locally some activities were managed by the Roma local NGOs and ISSA NGOs depended on them.

Another specific contribution of ISSA to the AGS project in 2011 was to develop a *Tool for Assessing the Quality Early Childhood Inclusive Practices* in center/community/home-based learning environments to be used by REF country-facilitators in their monitoring activities. The tool was accompanied by a scoring sheet and guidelines on how to be used and two trainings have been provided, one in 2012 and another one in the end of 2011 to REF country facilitators. The tool will be made available to all ISSA members after being reviewed by the Program Committee.

Another contribution consisted in developing a *Guidebook of Good Practice for Quality Practices in Inclusive Early Childhood Learning Environments* and to host a Transnational Workshop focusing of Quality Inclusive Practices for educators, in Bratislava in May. The workshop was highly appreciated by participants and the cooperation with Nadacia Skola Dokoran, ISSA's member in Slovakia, played an important role in the success of this activity. The Guidebook was put together by the following team: Zorica Trikić (main author), Mihaela Ionescu (coordinator) and Dawn Tankersley (revision). Once finalized, the Guidebook will be made available to all ISSA members.

Although a very important and large European project on Roma Early Childhood Inclusion, the *A Good Start* Project lacked a strong and consistent focus on strengthening the expertise of the human resources working directly with the children and their families in the project. ISSA and its members involved in the project stressed the limited time allocated for the trainings, considering the large amount of knowledge and skills needed on the local level. Therefore building on efforts which had begun in 2010, ISSA worked with REF to secure funding from the Bernard van Leer Foundation to cover additional activities for the AGS project. A meeting to discuss the grant took place in The Hague with BvLF, ISSA and REF representatives in February 2011. A joint proposal was submitted in March and approved by the Bernard van Leer Foundation. The additional support was provided for one year of project activities, between June 2011 - June 2012. ISSA's role in the new project activities will be to work on strengthening the capacity building component of the AGS EU-funded project (which was not sufficiently strong in the original proposal sent to the EU) in four communities involved in the project, by providing mentoring and follow-up visit on a monthly basis to teachers and mediators, to further support the improvement of their professional skills in working with Roma children and their families. The capacity building activities started in October 2011 and they will last until June 2012.

Funder: European Commission - DG Regio, Bernard van Leer Foundation

Partners: REF Budapest, Nadacia Skola Dokoran – Slovakia, Partners - Hungary, CEDP – Romania, FECIM – Macedonia, CIP - Serbia

I.3. Key Competences in Primary Schools Project

This project, which is coordinated by the Romanian Ministry of Education and which will cover ten counties from Romania, has started with delays. ISSA's role will start only in 2012. ISSA will contribute with experts hired from the network, for trainings and for development of resources which support reading and writing skills in primary school.

Funder: European Structural Funds, European Social Funds

Partners: Lead Partner: The Ministry of Education, Consultants to be hired by ISSA from CEDP – Romania

I.4. Roma Good Start Initiative

Considering the mechanisms through which ISSA is committed to achieve its goals, the invitation from UNICEF's Regional Office in Geneva to contribute to the implementation of an EU-funded project in Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Spain, implemented by UNICEF, OSF and REF, was received by ISSA with interest for at least three reasons:

- the project was closely aligned with ISSA's mission and Strategic Framework 2010-2012, more specifically with Goal I
- it provided an opportunity to contribute to a stronger positioning of ISSA NGOs in their countries as key players and pools of expertise in the Early Childhood and Roma Inclusion field
- it had the potential to strengthen ISSA's reputation on the international level and to create strong partnerships with important key organizations in the ECD and Roma Education field.

Within the framework of the *Roma Good Start Initiative (RGSi)*, a partnership agreement was signed between UNICEF and ISSA, working in cooperation with other partners, including OSF, REF, ISSA member organizations, Ministries of Education, Roma NGOs and other stakeholders. This partnership aims to increase capacity of relevant stakeholders and service providers to include Roma children in early childhood interventions and to strengthen and expand existing services to embrace and implement inclusive early childhood care and education approaches. The partnership is based on the belief that evidence based advocacy and dialogue are critical to support the development and/or revision of appropriate and responsive policies and their implementation. An additional overarching goal for the partnership was to bring to bear new as well as existing evidence from relevant research in advocacy activities conducted within the purview of RGSi. The effort was to take stock and share the latest thinking on the science of early childhood development, review the country-based evidence on the situation of young Roma children and stimulate dialogue with a view to sharing lessons learned and mainstreaming inclusive ECD in national policies, programmes and health, education, protection and welfare services. In carrying out the work, ISSA worked closely with project partners, primarily with its member NGOs and external consultants. In partnership with the Center for Education and Professional Development/Romania and the Center for Interactive Pedagogy/Serbia, as well as with other partners, ISSA coordinated the following activities:

Capacity building:

A series of three advanced seminars on child development were organized, in Budapest, Bucharest and Belgrade, to strengthen the capacity of practitioners, trainers of trainers and service providers to support the development of young children, especially of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as Roma children. Two Education for Social Justice Trainings were organized, in Bucharest and Belgrade, to strengthen the capacity of decision makers, practitioners and service providers to work in contexts of diversity, and be able to better respond to needs of children and families from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially Roma.

Awareness-raising:

A series of three public lectures were organized, in Budapest, Bucharest and Belgrade, to stress the importance of the early years, and the crucial role of care givers and of quality services. Three focus group discussions were organized with Roma mothers, in three cities in Serbia, in order to collect their inputs, and feed these into future activities for Roma early childhood inclusion. The focus group discussions were captured on video and resulted in the development of an advocacy/awareness raising documentary film entitled *Mothers Speak*.

Advocacy

Two policy dialogue roundtables were organized, in Bucharest and Belgrade, with the aim to strengthen and expand health, education and protection services to embrace and implement inclusive early childhood care and education approaches. Presentations focused on latest thinking on the science of early childhood development, as well as on a review of the situation of young Roma children. Participants shared lessons learned and developed recommendations for mainstreaming inclusive ECD in national policies, programmes and health, education, protection and welfare services. Two follow-up policy workshops were organized, in Bucharest and Belgrade, with the aim to develop local action plans based on recommendations resulting from the project.

All activities were successfully implemented, and received highly positive feedback from participants, in terms of reaching project objectives. Equally important, ISSA's member NGOs in Romania and Serbia reported that the initiative has strengthened their position in the country as a strong resource and a key partner on issues of Roma inclusion in ECD.

I.5. Book “Early Childhood Programs as the Doorway to Social Cohesion: Application of Vygotsky’s Ideas from an East-West Perspective”

Knowledge creation and dissemination, as well as providing useful and inspiring resources to members of the network are ongoing concerns for ISSA as a professional association. The volume put together by ISSA with Bernard van Leer Foundation support with ideas presented at the 2007 EECERA Conference hosted by ISSA, was published in early 2011 by Cambridge Scholars Publishing. ISSA purchased a copy for each member, using a special discounted price offered to authors. It is hoped that the volume does not only fill a gap in the literature on early childhood education, but also contributes to making better known the expertise of scholars and practitioners from the East, including those from the ISSA network.

Funder: Bernard van Leer Foundation; Partners: Jacqueline Hayden and Aija Tuna, as co-editors.
Contributors (authors of chapters): experts from the ISSA network and external experts

I.6. International partnerships and ISSA Network’s Participation in International Task Forces, Working Groups, Meetings and Other Initiatives focusing on Access to ECD Services

ISSA-DECET Cooperation

As a professional network representing members from CEE/CIS, ISSA has built upon the expertise that has been developed in the region and has explored various ways of expanding it and also of sharing it through partnerships and joint initiatives with partners from other parts of the world, including with DECET, a similar network from Western Europe. Over the last few years, members of ISSA and of DECET have expressed their mutual interest to share their expertise, as well as their common and sometimes complementary approaches. Building upon previous efforts towards strengthening the cooperation between the two networks, a decision was made to have a joint meeting in 2011. Representatives of ISSA's Program Committee and Secretariat met with DECET members in a joint **Member Exchange Seminar** organized in early April 2011 in Athens, with funding from the Bernard van Leer

Foundation. Participants shared information from the history, beliefs and vision for the future of each network and explored what are the interests, motivation and opportunities for closer cooperation from both sides. As next steps, the two networks set up a **Joint Task Force**, with members appointed by the Boards of the two associations. This task force will prepare scenarios and during a joint Board Meeting in 2012 (possibly in October), they will present to the two Boards their recommendations for closer cooperation both at the organizational level and at the level of specific projects or activity. More details about the results of the discussions during the Member Exchange Seminar are available in the **Report** from this meeting, which is posted on the ISSA Online Community under Network News.

Another recent example of a joint initiative is the publication researched and developed by the DECET/ISSA Joint Working Group on Professionalism: ***Diversity and Social Inclusion: Exploring Competences for Professional Practice in Early Childhood Education and Care***, which was released in the autumn 2011. A link to this publication is available from the ISSA external website under Latest News.

Building on cooperation which has already developed successfully over the past few years, the two networks have recently embarked on a new major joint project – an **International Conference on Professionalism in ECEC**, to be organized in October 2012 (see below under Goal II).

ISSA and DECET launched a call for expression of interest to all ISSA members for participating in a **European Training of Trainers organizing by two DECET members** in May 2012, in Spain, where both DECET and ISSA members are invited. The training will focus on creating an understanding of common aims towards equity and respect for diversity; learning from each other; discovering similarities and differences; transfer of innovative training methodologies; building a network of trainers across the two networks. Representatives from 10 ISSA members have expressed their interest to attend, several of them as presenters. This promises to be a valuable professional development and networking opportunity.

Participation in International Meetings and Initiatives

In order to contribute to a better positioning of ISSA as a strong professional association in the ECD international arena, as well as to reach for opportunities to acknowledge and expand the expertise capitalized by ISSA through its members, ISSA participates in international events and meetings that are closely aligned with its mission and Strategic Framework. ISSA also seeks participation in meetings that provide new opportunities for partnerships to serve ISSA members or to strengthen ISSA's positioning in the ECD international discourse. In 2011 ISSA participated in the following meetings and initiatives related to Goal I:

ISSA's Executive Director attended an Expert Meeting organized as follow up to the 4th meeting of the European Platform for Roma Inclusion "Preventing Social Exclusion Through Europe 2020: Early Childhood Development and the Inclusion of Roma Families", held during the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in Brussels on 13 December 2010. The Expert Meeting took place in Budapest on February 23rd 2011, organised in cooperation with the Hungarian Presidency and UNICEF and in conjunction with the Hungarian EU Presidency Conference on "Early Childhood: Excellence and Equity in Early Childhood Education and Care" (Budapest, February 21-22, 2011). The aim of the Expert Meeting was to enhance the paper "Preventing social exclusion through the Europe 2020 Strategy: Early childhood development and the inclusion of Roma families". Suggestions provided by ISSA's ED included references to ISSA's resources on Quality and ESJ, which, as a result, were included in the paper.

UNICEF Turkey invited ISSA to present its work around the Quality Principles and Education for Social Justice in a conference organized under a large EU grant for Turkey (March 11-12, 2011, Istanbul). The Conference, which was organized by the Association of Private Educational Institutions/Turkey and the Ministry of National Education in Turkey, with support of UNICEF Turkey, addressed ECD policies, practices, and curricula, with the aim to directly feed into the process of extending ECD services in Turkey, through the EU-UNICEF funded project "Strengthening

the Preschool Education". The Program Director presented on ISSA's behalf and had preliminary discussions on how ISSA could contribute to the project with expertise from the network. The participation of the PD was very successful therefore she was invited again, in the framework on the same Project, to participate to a workshop in Ankara (October 2011) where all partners and local experts gathered to discuss and start framing the Quality Standards in the Turkish Pre-school System. The presentation of the PD was highly appreciated and led to hiring ISSA as a consultant to UNICEF Turkey for providing assistance to ACEV in developing the ECE Standards. The contract was envisaged to start from January to May 2012.

ISSA facilitated and fundraised for participation of ISSA and Roma NGO reps from Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia to a BVLFF workshop on Roma ECD (April 4-5, The Hague). Altogether twelve NGO representatives attended with support from ISSA's facilitation, as well as ISSA's Executive Director. Through their input in the event, they contributed to shared-learning on the topic of Roma ECD, and they also reinforced the ISSA network's visibility and credibility. During the event, further discussions were held on cooperation with BVLFF through a grant awarded jointly to ISSA and REF.

The ISSA Secretariat facilitated a study visit to Hungary for a group of 30 Romanian county inspectors and other participants in the EU-funded project on Roma Inclusion: *School, A Chance for Everyone*. The ED presented ISSA and the Quality Resource Pack. The crucial role of ISSA's member in Romania was stressed by participants, as well as the useful information gained during the visit (Budapest, September 26-28).

The Executive Director was invited to introduce the theme of a working group, and present on *Further Developing Access to Quality Early Childhood Care and Education and Strengthen Community Participation*, during a Regional Expert Meeting entitled *Promoting the right to quality education for Roma people*, organized by UNESCO and the Ministry of Education in Serbia (Belgrade, Serbia, 17-18 October 2011). As a result, ISSA began exploring possibilities for the ISSA network to be involved in actions resulting from the recommendations of the meeting (capacity building and information sharing).

As part of her professional development, the ISSA Network Manager attended the Eurochild's 8th Annual Conference 2011: *Tackling child poverty through supporting and strengthening families* (30 November - 2 December, 2011, Cardiff, Wales, UK). A report was posted on the Online Community/Network News. She also attended the meeting of Eurochild's Thematic Working Group on Early Years. Follow up discussions took place to explore the possibility for ISSA to be Eurochild's partner for an advocacy event on Access/Equity and Quality, to which the European Commission's DG Education and Culture and other high level stakeholders would be invited.

Through facilitation of Eurochild, since ISSA is a member of their Thematic Working Group on Early Years, the ISSA Executive Director attended a Consultation Symposium on *Measures to Combat Educational Disadvantage*, organized by DG Education & Culture (December 8-9, Brussels). A report e was shared with the network on the Online Community/Network News.

Consultancy

Given the expertise that ISSA has gained in the field of diversity and quality in ECD, in January 2011, ISSA provided consultancy to Aga Khan Foundation. The Consultancy consisted in preparing and delivering a two-day training for children's books authors from Kyrgyzstan focusing on promoting diversity and inclusion in the broader framework of quality pedagogy.

Part of the agreement was also to sell to AKF license to publish 4 titles in three languages from ISSA's Reading Corner children's story books, to be printed in partnership with FEIS-Kyrgyzstan and to be disseminated in the country during 2011-2012.

Goal II - Promote high quality and professionalism in providing care and education for young children

Overview of Progress under Goal II

The main focus of ISSA's work in this goal was to support members to use the new ISSA Resource Pack for Quality Pedagogy.

Since many of the resources are new and additional methodology is required for their use (see the Professional Development Tools, the Assessment Instrument, the Video Library, the Online Course), this year the activity around this goal focused on three directions:

- 1. Finalizing the English and Russian versions of all resources** and making them available to all members on the Online Community; finalizing methodologies for how to use the tools available in the Resource Pack (Professional Development Tool for Improving the Quality of Practices in Kindergarten and Primary School, Instrument for Assessing Quality Practices, Video Library for illustrating practices around the Quality Principles)
- 2. Development of a Strategic Framework for the use of the resources:** building on the specific information collected by the ISSA Secretariat during the month of May 2011, in the first half of 2011 ISSA's Program Committee has developed the first draft of a multi-year plan for how ISSA can best support the meaningful use of these resources at country and network level to ensure the quality of practices throughout the region. The draft was reviewed by members via consultations led by Regional Anchors, and voted on during October 2011. This strategic framework will be included in the Strategy Framework 2013-2015, to be developed in 2012.
- 3. Building shared understanding of quality and ensuring reliability** on the network level by organizing a thematic meeting around Quality Pedagogy, through member exchanges, reliability study visits, technical assistance, Online Community discussion around video clips, Online Course, etc.

II.1. Finalizing the English and Russian versions of all resources from the Quality Resource Pack

As part of the benefits offered to members, and in order to support ISSA's work towards achieving its strategic goals, by building on what has been invested in previous years with support from OSF for developing relevant resources for increasing and sustaining quality in ECD services, the following **Resource Pack on ISSA's Definition of Quality Pedagogy** were finalized in 2011:

1. *Competent Educators of the 21st Century: ISSA's Principles of Quality Pedagogy (booklet and poster)*
2. *Putting Knowledge into Practice— A Guidebook for Teachers*
3. *Professional Development Tool for Improving Quality Practice in Preschool*
4. *Professional Development Tool for Improving Quality Practice in Primary School*
5. *Video Library on Good Practices in ECD*
6. *"Teachers that Make a Difference" – Online Course for Professional Development of Kindergarten Teachers*
7. *Instrument for Assessing Quality Practices in Early Childhood Services for children from 3 to 10 years old.*

Here is some additional information regarding the development of ISSA's resources around Quality:

1. *Competent Educators of the 21st Century: ISSA's Principles of Quality Pedagogy:* English, French and Russian versions uploaded on the Online Community and on the ISSA external website. Russian copies of the booklet (printed based on request) and additional copies in English were disseminated among members during the

October meetings. A new folded-poster was developed within the Roma Good Start Initiative based on the layout idea of the Croatian NGO. English and Russian versions of the posters uploaded on the Online Community. Members were surveyed on how many printed copies of the posters they need in English and in Russian and orders were placed for printing, with funds from OSF. 3000 copies were produced in English and 6000 in Russian. Also 200 copies were produced in Romanian and Serbian within the RGSi project.

2. *Putting Knowledge into Practice – a Guidebook for Teachers*: English and Russian electronic versions were finalized and uploaded on the Online Community.
3. *Professional Development Tool for Improving Quality Practices in ECD in Preschool*
4. *Professional Development Tool for Improving Quality Practices in ECD in Primary School* (this is the final title of the previously titled *Continuum of Quality Practices*): Both these publications have been translated into Russian and have been uploaded on the ISSA Online Community, where they are also available in English. For both tools, in the end of 2011, the PD together with Stephanie Olmore and Dawn Tankersley worked on developing the protocols and scoring sheets to be used when working with the tools. The Program Committee was involved in reviewing the documents. In the end of the year the documents were edited, laid out and translated into Russian.
5. *Video library*: Translation of subtitles in Russian for all available video clips was finalized, and the video clips used in the Online Course were translated into Slovak as well. For easier access, the videos on www.vimeo.com, were sorted by title, language of subtitles and principle/indicator they illustrate. 23 videos are available in the Video Library on the Online Community. For enriching the video library with 20 additional videos, in order to illustrate all focus areas of the Principles and reflect the diversity of the network, a Call for Expression of Interest for making additional videos was launched in the network in April 2011. NGOs from 5 countries expressed their interest in contributing to this activity. During June an analysis of the already existing videos was initiated and tasks were distributed to each of the NGOs involved. Lithuania (5 videos), Czech Republic (5 videos), Mongolia (4 videos), Croatia (3 videos) and Latvia (3 videos) contributed to the expansion of the video library. By the end of the year the videos were transferred for embedding the English subtitles An IT consultant was hired to assist the ISSA Secretariat in developing the videos.
6. *Online Course*: Course modules were finalized and were reviewed and approved by the funder (IBM). The advertising process started in May and the recruitment of two cohorts ended in July 15th. The course is scheduled to run between mid-October 2011 - mid-March 2012 in English and in Slovak. The English cohort includes participants from 10 countries, recruited with help from members and partners both from within and from outside the ISSA network: Azerbaijan, Belarus, Haiti, Estonia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Northern Ireland, Holland and the USA. By the end of 2011, based on very enthusiastic feedback from participants, ISSA is delighted to report that the course has become what it was envisaged it to be: a vibrant exchange online, which seems to be a very useful and meaningful professional development for participants. Participants highlighted the innovative character of the materials presented, as well as the strong coherence at the conceptual level, in terms of the pedagogical principles which provide the framework for the course. In some cases participants reported that the ideas presented in the course are not always new, but they all do reinforce shared beliefs and through the interaction with others new insights are gained even in such instances, as well as new skills and abilities for self-reflection. The mid-term report prepared for IBM was shared with the network on the Online Community. Judging by the number of hits, the news was received with enthusiasm for members, who see great potential in developing their ability to deliver online education.
7. *Instrument for Assessing Quality Practices in Early Childhood Services for children from 3 to 10 years old* (previously called *Short Instrument*): Classroom observations were collected from ISSA quality experts at the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2011. A Call for Applications was launched in February and a Selection Committee (Dawn Tankersley, Stephanie Olmore, Mihaela Ionescu) reviewed applications and finalized selection of a university to conduct data analysis. The contract was signed in March with the Centre for the Evaluation of Socio-Educational Profiles, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj Napoca, Romania. The report providing the instrument and the database were submitted in May 2011. The results of the study were very interesting and insightful for all the work around ISSA's Principles and Indicators, and they were presented during the Council Meeting. By the end of the year, Stephanie Olmore contributed to the development of the protocol and scoring sheet for using the tool, and the Program Committee continued to work on reviewing the documents. In the beginning of 2012, the documents were edited, translated into Russian and laid-out.

Before the October Council Meeting, the Program Committee worked on developing a document presenting the ISSA Quality Resource Pack which has been introduced to all Council Members in Sofia. The document was meant to give a brief overview of all resources in the package, by specifying what each resource represents, what it contains, what its uses are and how it connects with the other tools in the package. The document was developed with the intention to build shared understanding of all resources among ISSA members, but also to present the QRP to audiences outside the network or members' partners in their countries.

The Study on the Implementation of the ISSA Pedagogical Standards in both versions of the full-report (in English and in Russian) was finalized by having it edited and laid out, and it is uploaded on the ISSA Online Community, along with the Executive Summary of the Study, also available in both languages. The Executive Summary is also available on ISSA's external website.

Funders/Partners: OSF, IBM, EU

Consultants: ISSA Member NGOs, Stephanie Olmore, Research Center from Cluj Napoca/Romania

II.2. Development of a Strategic Framework for the use of the Quality Resources

The investment in the hard collective work to develop a complex and systemic resource pack focusing on quality in early childhood and primary school settings needed to be secured by having a strategy on how all these resources will become useful and meaningful to all ISSA members. For that reason ISSA developed a strategic document during the first half of 2011. The work on the **Quality Assurance and Improvement Strategy (QAIS)** started during the Program Committee meeting in April 2011 in Athens and it was continued during the PC Meeting in June 2011 with the new composition of the Program Committee. During the month of May, ISSA ran the OSF-ISSA Data Collection Survey (using a form reviewed by Program Committee members) which included also specific questions related to the ISSA Quality Resource Pack. All data was processed into a Preliminary Report, which was shared with Program Committee members before the June Program Committee Meeting in Istanbul.

The Strategy was developed through a strong participatory work of all Program Committee members, of ISSA program consultants and staff, and of Stephanie Olmore as ISSA external consultant, based on an in-depth analysis of the following documents:

- *Preliminary Report* from the OSF-ISSA Data Collection Survey ran in May 2011
- Conclusions of the *Quality Experts Meeting* organized by ISSA in August 2009
- Recommendations from the *Study on Implementation of ISSA Pedagogical Standards and their Impact of ECDE Policies and Practices in the Region of ISSA's Network and Beyond* during 2001-2008 (2010)
- Conclusions from the *Report on Developing the Instrument for Assessing Quality Practices* (2011)

The Strategy considered the work and experiences accumulated on the network and local level until present and the data referring to actions/activities ran by NGOs in 2010-2011, as well as the relevant ways for sustaining throughout the next three years the focus on promoting, assuring and maintaining the quality of services and learning environments for children from birth to 10 years old, and their families in all the network.

Before this document was presented for review and vote during the Council Meeting in October 2011, the following consultation process took place between July - September 2011:

- ISSA's Regional Anchors consulted with members and collected answers based on specific questions. The results of their consultations were made available to the Program Committee and Board.
- The Secretariat consulted with OSF colleagues
- Consultations with the ISSA Board took place after the feedback from the members and from OSF were obtained, and a final version was prepared with help from the Program Committee before the October Meeting.

The Quality Assurance and Improvement Strategy was introduced to Council Members during the October Meeting when it was endorsed and approved by members. The document is presented in the Annexes of this report.

Funders: OSF through the General Support Grant

II.3. Building shared understanding of quality and ensuring reliability on the network level

Within the framework of the 2011 Work Plan, voted by the ISSA Council, in June 2011 ISSA organized in Istanbul a **Thematic Meeting on Pre-service Training of Early Childhood Professionals and Quality of ECD today**. Fifteen countries from Central-Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Mongolia and Azerbaijan were represented in the meeting, each with two representatives: one from the ISSA NGO and one from an early childhood pre-service training institution.

The main **objectives and expected outcomes** of the meeting were:

- To facilitate exchange of experiences between countries related to main focus areas in pre-service training of ECD professionals
- To develop recommendations regarding each of the 4 topics of the meeting from the perspective of the up-to-date discourse in ECD
- To create a platform for cooperation for a joint projects (such as TEMPUS application) for 2012.

The meeting focused on **four key topics**:

1. Changes in pre-service training institutions required by the current ECD discourse
2. Pre-service curriculum for future early childhood professionals working with children from birth to 6: approach and relation with national policies in ECD
3. Pedagogical practicum: organization, methods used, evaluation
4. Teaching strategies in higher education: approach, competences sought for future teachers

The meeting was organized by balancing plenary presentations and discussions with interactive group working and almost all countries made a presentation around one of the four topics. Pamela Oberhuemer gave the opening presentation of the meeting focusing on *Early Childhood Educators. Cross-national perspectives on professional education, training and development* – a brief summary of the results of the SEEPRO project, introducing challenging issues related to early childhood professionals status and initial and continuous preparation of early childhood professionals in European countries and the wide range of the diversity around this profession.

The main issues of the meeting, which connected to all key topics, were related to: today's challenges faced by children, their families, teachers and education systems, the missing educators' competences addressing the today's challenges and ways in which pre-service training should answer to the ECD requirements of today by reviewing their curriculum, teaching strategies and practicum. The central focus of the meeting was also to introduce the Quality Resource Pack, as a valuable resource for improving teachers' preparation, to representatives from the higher education institutions and also to encourage their cooperation with ISSA's NGOs on the local level, for influencing the quality of the initial preparation of professionals working in the early childhood services.

During the meeting participants contributed to the **development of the following set of documents**:

- List of challenges facing the early childhood education field today
- List of competences which are now missing from the profile of early years educators, taking into account newly emerging needs of children, families and changing societies
- Specific educators' competences needed in today's world
- Proposed set of recommendations for early childhood pre-service training institutions related to curriculum development, teaching strategies and practicum.

The two sessions allocated for establishing cooperation between countries and ISSA NGOs and higher education institutions contributed to **planning further partnership projects and cooperation on two topics:**

- Setting the ground for a partnership project focusing on developing professional learning communities between universities preparing teachers, ISSA member NGOs and pre-schools/school teachers. Preliminary title of the project: *Development of students' competences through learning communities* or *Democratization of students' practicum through learning communities*
- Improving the quality of teaching/learning in early childhood pre-service education, with the focus on developing a training module and manual for university teachers.

The set of documents resulting from the meeting, as well as other relevant resources, were posted in the beginning of July on ISSA's external website and on the Online Community.

A Thematic Meeting on New Perspectives on Building Professionalism in ECD took place in September. 24 NGOs signed up for the places covered from the ISSA budget and 6 were added from the waiting list. Several NGOs sent participants at their own costs. This reflected the high interest of ISSA members in the topic of quality, professionalism and professional learning communities (PLC) in ECD, as well as in the opportunity to learn from their peers. Three external guest speakers were invited:

- Ana de Barrio – Bureau Mutant, (The Netherlands)- led a workshop on *Learning more about Professional Learning Communities*
- Dr. Mathias Urban – University of East London (UK) – presented on *Professionalism in Early Childhood Education and Care. Critical issues, challenges and possibilities*
- Dr. Jan Peeters – BvJK (Belgium) – presented on *Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care*, results of the study commissioned by The European Commission – Directorate General for Education and Culture

The focus of the meeting was Professionalism in ECD – Building Professional Learning Communities and its design followed a growing spiral from theory to practice, to which invited speakers' and participants' equally contributed. The meeting was evaluated by the members as very successful, providing them with new insights on critical issues regarding professionalization of ECEC workforce today but also with new skills through the workshop conducted by Ana del Barrio on building professional learning communities. Useful and relevant contributions came from Slovenia (Tatjana Vonta) and Croatia (Sanja Brajkovic), sharing their experiences in their countries in building PLC. The meeting also served as a very good opportunity to start reflecting on how much ISSA is a PLC and how much the resources developed so far in ISSA around quality (QRP) could contribute to improving the professionalism of ECD human resources and support the process of developing PLC on the local level. The meeting alternated various methods of working with the large group and in small groups and encouraged critical thinking, reflection, participation, sharing and planning future work around quality (e.g.: scenarios on how tools in the QRP could be used to set-up, build and maintain a PLC). In order to continue discussions and sharing, a group on the theme of Professional Development was created on the Online Community. Also the summary evaluation of the meeting was posted on the Online Community together with all presentations from the meeting, in a special folder in the Library, under Professionalism.

By the end of 2011, for supporting ISSA members in continuing their work around quality, the Program Committee approved two ISSA members' applications for **Member Exchanges** and one for **Technical Assistance**. All three applications were related to using the ISSA Quality Resource Pack.

Under **Member Exchanges** applications:

1. **Center for Educational Initiatives Step by Step/Bosnia and Herzegovina** organized in August a three days Regional Conference focusing on quality. It's main objectives were:
 - To use the professional capacities and resources of the Step by Step network ("Competent Educators of the 21st Century") and other NGOs and professionals in order to improve their knowledge and reach a level of common understanding about the definition of quality education, quality assessment and quality improvement.

- To raise the awareness about the importance of quality education, the teaching process and the need for increased investments in quality improvement in preschool, primary and higher education (Pre-service teacher training) based on quality standards.
- To explore, present, investigate and discuss a wide variety of possible professional development opportunities and strategies, including the use of ICT.
- To build on the Step by Step network and other existing networks and coalitions and explore opportunities and ideas for a stronger and more effective cooperation and partnership within the civil society sector and between different NGOs, policy makers, professionals, parents and students in the Region in order to advocate for every child's right to a quality education.

During the Conference participants were provided with a copy of *ISSA's Principles: Competent Educators of the 21st Century*, and of the *Putting Knowledge into Practice – Guidebook for Teachers* in local language. Professionals from six countries who work in such diverse areas as preschool to higher education improved their knowledge about quality standards and professional development strategies. Approximately 300 participants became familiar with ISSA's Principles and learnt how to use the resources in order to improve everyday practice, culture and policies. There were more than 30 workshops about quality standards, roundtables and discussions about issues of quality in education and presentation of good practice for parents and teachers, and a conference "Open day" - demonstration of quality practice for children and parents, visitors from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina. Step by Step NGOs and teachers prepared art, language, science, drama, music, mathematical and other activities that children and parents could join. A Parent Room was established providing parents with the opportunity to talk with professionals.

Five ISSA members participated in the conference together with practitioners from their countries: *Center for Interactive Pedagogy/Serbia, Open Academy Step by Step/Croatia, Foundation for Educational and Cultural Initiatives Step by Step/Macedonia, Pedagogical Centre/Montenegro and Developmental Research Centre for Educational Initiatives Step by Step/Slovenia*. The application requested funds to support their participation.

2. **Step by Step Czech Republic** engaged in an exchange of experience with Croatia, focusing on their expertise regarding the implementation of ISSA's Definition of Quality Pedagogy in several different areas: mentoring, certification process, school improvement, self-evaluation.

The objectives of this member exchange were:

- To provide teachers from a kindergarten in Croatia (Zagreb) and one in the Czech Republic (Frydek-Mistek) with more support for their professional development, focusing mainly on the exchange of experiences and mutual inspiration, sharing of best practice performance management of training and other development activity, mentoring and its implementation
- To start and consequently enhance cooperation and networking of two kindergartens within the international network of ISSA
- To incorporate new knowledge and experience around ISSA's Quality Principles and the use of ISSA QRP in mentoring.
- To acquire skills and gain more experience, best practices and strategies required for the deployment and implementation of mentoring support for kindergartens in the Czech Republic.

A four day visit was organized for 4 kindergartens teachers and 1 school principal from the Czech Republic.

According to the reports developed based on the Member Exchange activity, the Czech colleagues appreciated the visit as very useful and effective because of the opportunity to enhance their educational knowledge, skills in their work around on quality. They got inspired by the mentoring system in Croatia and its implementation as a significant and meaningful tool for enhancing the quality of practices. They witnessed different ways of applying the ISSA Principles into teacher's daily practice. Introducing the online courses by the Croatian team was also very inspirational.

Under **Technical Assistance** applications:

Step by Step Czech Republic required assistance in providing trainings on mentoring with the purpose of connecting Step by Step mentors with pre-service training institutions for future educators, and in this way promoting ISSA's work around Quality Principles. For the Technical Assistance support, Dawn Tankersley was requested as ISSA's expert.

The objectives of the Technical Assistance were:

- To train a new group of mentors among teachers of kindergartens and elementary schools SbS and other teaching faculties in the Czech Republic to be able to provide individual support to students to develop their skills in implementing ISSA's Principles in practice (ISSA's Definition of Quality Pedagogy: Competent Educators of the 21st Century)
- To make short videos that will correspond to the Principles and Indicators. These videos are to be widely disseminated through seminars in the presentation of the Principles, etc.
- To prepare a video clip of an interview model mentor-mentee as a concrete example from practice. The video was intended to capture the interview process (phases of mentoring conversation) and should serve as a training model for mentoring courses. Previous experience showed that at the beginning participants encounter sometimes difficulties to imagine how the interview between mentor and mentee should evolve and such audio-video support will substantially help.
- To pilot and subsequently revise the existing file on quality of the student's work, which arises in the context of the OSF-funded project mentoring support for students of teaching, which implements the SBS program in cooperation with Charles University this year, so that it may be usable by other faculties in the Czech Republic

According to the reports, the main outcomes of the activity were that participants developed greater familiarity with the tools in the ISSA Resource Pack, developed greater understanding of how to create professional learning communities and how to use them for mentoring student teachers, worked on taking questions to deeper levels when facing dilemmas in their mentoring, and also they were introduced to other sources of influence to include social sources of influence through professional learning communities and structural sources of influence including the ISSA Quality Resource Pack.

Conclusions from the reports:

- Although the Czech Step by Step Program has been working on mentoring in teams, the introduction of professional learning communities and how to work in them was well received in that it expanded their concept of how it could offer even greater participation in the process by all members including the student teachers. It was explained that ISSA was now moving into promoting this area of professional development as it is more aligned with all of our Principles and promote greater inclusion, diversity, and participation in learning and development.
- Using videos from other countries provided for greater diversity among the participants in opinions of where a teacher can be rated. This brought up the point that the PDTs if are used with videos to discuss quality – that the focus has to be only on the discussion of quality and to not use them for rating for reliability among us.
- The participants appeared to get a lot from working with the Influencer Model to resolve challenges they see in mentoring.
- Although the participants were very receptive to the Influencer Model it was clear that more time will be needed to truly understand its potential as a mentoring tool. Almost all of the participants were challenged in moving beyond the personal motivation and ability levels to understand what they can also do at the social and structural motivation and ability levels to help teachers move into quality practice. This is to say that they still look at training and mentoring as the only options in their realm of influence instead of trying to do other things such as set up professional learning communities as well look at elements in the non-

human resources area, for instance how the environment, different policies, additional resources also influence behavioral change

- Sbs Czech Republic managed to collaborate, connect and contribute together on a series of innovative approaches with Faculty of Pedagogy, with Step by Step schools, where students perform their practice, and also to build the Step by Step program into the courses for the student teachers of Charles University Faculty of Education (which is unique in the country).
- The contribution of ISSA's expert, Dawn Tankersley, was very highly appreciated.

In the end of 2011, one more Technical Assistance activity was supported through ISSA's funds. During the Council Meeting, the ISSA Secretariat was approached by Khamida Akhmedova, director of **Farzandim Jigarbandim NGO from Uzbekistan**, requiring support for organizing a Training of Trainers by December 2011 for a group of 40 participants: pre-school teachers, directors and trainers on Quality Practices whom in the next period were to deliver trainings to ECE practitioners in the country. The two experts from the network who assisted the Uzbek NGO in providing the ToT were Ulviyya Mikailova and Lamiya Sharafkhanova from the Center for Innovations in Education – Azerbaijan. The ToT was highly appreciated by the Uzbek participants.

Also during the year of 2011, ISSA Secretariat was approached by the Kyrgyz member NGO, **Foundation for Education Support Initiatives**, which was interested in providing to a delegation of people from the Kyrgyz Ministry of Education and universities a study trip to a country where there is expertise and experience in the field of inclusive education targeting children with special needs of preschool and primary age. The initiative was part of a World Bank project, which also covered the expenses. Based on the call launched by the Secretariat, the Center for Innovative Education from Lithuania hosted the visit and organized meetings to the Lithuanian Ministry of Education, to universities and preschool centers for sharing their experiences. Although it was not funded by ISSA, this member exchange activity is an example of how ISSA's Secretariat plays the role of facilitating member exchanges in the network.

Funder: OSF through the General Support Grant

II.4. Other Partnership Initiatives Related to Goal II

Joint ISSA-DECET International Conference on Professionalism in ECEC in October 2012 in Croatia

In 2011 preparations began for this event, after the ISSA Board approved the recommendation from the Program Committee during the February 2011 Board Meeting to pursue this initiative. The joint recommendations and an **Overall Concept for Internal Planning** coming from ISSA's Program Committee and a Working Group from DECET were reviewed and approved by the two Boards, and thus it was decided that ISSA and DECET will co-host an international conference between 15-17 October 2012, with the following title ***Co-constructing Professional Learning – Pathways towards Quality, Equity and Respect for Diversity in ECEC***. The conference will be organized by ISSA, DECET and Open Academy Step by Step Croatia. The Concept for Internal Planning, available on the Online Community under Network News, outlines the general thematic focus, objectives of the event, organizing committees, target audience, location, dates etc. In the second half of the year, the two Boards finalized the process of appointing network representatives on the two Conference Committees – Organizing Committee and Conference Program Committee.

Before the end of the year the two Committees worked on finalizing a Conference Management Plan, signing a memorandum among the three partners and a contract with the conference organizing agency, selecting keynote speakers, and outlining the three strands of the Conference. A **Save the Date Announcement** was made public before the end of the year, with a link from ISSA's external site.

From ISSA's perspective this international conference will build upon the **Thematic Meeting on New Perspectives on Building Professionalism in ECD**, which was organized in September 2011, and will also tie in closely with the multi-year **Quality Assurance and Improvement Strategy**, pursuing in particular the objective to promote and advocate for Quality ECD in the region and for innovative approaches to Quality.

Participation in International Meetings and Initiatives

The Program Director attended the *Closing Conference of the CoRe project* (October 7, Brussels) where the CoRe Study was launched. Highlights from the conference were posted in a report on the Online Community. The Secretariat advertised the event in the ISSA network. Other representatives from the ISSA network were Tatjana Vonta (Slovenia) who had a presentation as participant in the research, and Eteri Gvineria, from the Center for Educational Initiatives, Georgia - as conference participant.

Discussions were held with the UNICEF office in Bosnia/Herzegovina, who invited ISSA to send a representative from the network to join as keynote speaker at their ECD International Conference, which will be organized in February 2012. Regina Sabaliauskiene and Sanja Handjar will represent ISSA and will introduce the Quality Resource Pack.

As part of her professional development, the Program Director attended the Conference *Looking at the Future through the Eyes of Children*, organized by the Center for Research and Documentation from San Miniato/Italy (November 11-12, 2012). During the event she made contacts which could be useful for the 2012 Thematic Meeting on Quality (specifically on documentation, as the hosting organization has worked for more than 30 years using various means of documentation). She also consulted with the partners in the SPIRAL consortium.

Goal III - Promote civil society participation, community-based ECD and parental education

Overview of Progress under Goal III

The plan for this goal in 2011 was to focus primarily on Parenting Programs, by bringing into the network new approaches and resources. Given the intense focus on the other three strategic goals, in 2011, the only steps that were feasible were to prepare the ground for a consortium of NGOs which would work in partnership with ISSA and ACEV on a project proposal. During the process of planning for 2012 and for the next strategy period, the Program Committee will propose further ways to strengthen ISSA's work under this Goal.

Specific objectives:

- *Disseminate examples of good practice in the area of community based ECD*
- *Facilitate sharing of experiences and of new resources in working with parents*

III.1. Smooth Transitions Project

At the beginning of 2011, partners in this project, which was funded through an Innovative Grant from OSF, consulted on what last steps to take to finalize the project. Initially the plan was to conduct a mapping of examples of good practice of community-based interventions, however partners in the project lost enthusiasm to do this, since many other international organizations have successfully conducted such mapping. Additionally, the project partners were much more interested in implementation on the ground.

After consultations also with the Program Committee it was decided to propose to OSF and to the ISSA Board to close the project and not to request the last installment from OSF for finalizing the project. Project participants have reflected on successes and challenges of this project, and lessons learnt will inform future planning and implementation.

III.2. Parenting Initiative

Instead of continuing the Smooth Transitions project, everyone agreed that it is better to develop a new proposal for an Innovative Grant, focusing on Parenting Programs in cooperation with a cluster of interested ISSA members and ACEV. A call for expression of interest to join such a cluster was launched in the spring and 11 NGOs expressed their interest, choosing particular focus areas (Fathers Program, Program for Mothers in Rural Areas and Roma Women). The initial plan was to develop the new proposal during 2011, however after analyzing the workload and available time and human capital, the Secretariat decided it is not feasible to pursue this proposal in 2011, and to postpone its development until early 2012, as part of the Work Plan 2012.

During the October 2011 Meetings, a meeting was organized with OSF, representatives of ACEV and interested ISSA members to discuss plans for moving forward with this initiative during 2012. A 5-day training is planned on ACEV's Fathers Support Program, which was included in ISSA's 2012 Work Plan, to be organized in March 2012 in Istanbul. A call for participation was launched and a large number of ISSA members signed up. The training will be followed by setting up a consortium with those NGOs which are committed to implementation at the local level, and the proposal will be developed to be submitted to OSF.

Partner/Funder: OSF through an Innovative Grant to ISSA

Project partners/Consultants in the Smooth Transitions Project: ISSA Member NGOs in Moldova, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovenia and Armenia; ACEV/Turkey and Comenius/Poland; external consultants; other interested ISSA members who will join the training in March 2012.

Goal IV- Enhance the capacity of the ISSA network to deliver its strategy

Overview of Progress under Goal IV

During 2011, progress under this goal included:

- *Smooth functioning of the Program Committee, Regional Anchors and other ISSA Bodies under the new fine-tuned organizational framework, which led to more meaningful and dynamic member engagement*
- *Successfully running the OSF/ISSA Data Survey to inform strategic planning*
- *Development and approval of the Work Plan 2012 and the multi-year Strategy Framework on Quality*
- *Further steps in changing the organizational culture and increasing capacity to effectively use an online tool for collaboration, knowledge management and distance learning.*
- *A large number of publications*
- *Professional Development Funds offered to Regional Anchors and members of the Program Committee*
- *A Project Proposal submitted to the European Commission/ Comenius as main applicant*

Specific objectives:

- *Ensure smooth operations, sustainability, sound governance, members' ownership and engagement*
- *Strengthen professional and organizational capacity in the network*
- *Facilitate transfer of knowledge and experiences*

IV.1. Membership Issues

IV.1.1. Members' engagement and ownership

As an important aspect regarding member's engagement in the networks' life and activity, in 2011 more than 2/3 of the Member NGOs (representatives of 18 organizations) are serving on governance and operational bodies:

- ISSA Board
- Audit Committee
- Nominations Committee
- Program Committee
- Regional Anchors
- Task Forces

The revised **Organizational Chart** was made available on the ISSA Online Community under ISSA Organizational Info. The Chart outlines governance and operational bodies agreed upon during the recent strategic planning process. An extensive process of revising, fine-tuning and clarifying the role of the Program Committee and the Regional Anchors began during the October 2010 Council Meeting and was continued by the Secretariat and the Board and finalized during the Board Meeting in February 2011. Documents outlining the profile of these two bodies, as well as other documents related to the **operational and governance framework** have all been uploaded on the Online Community/ISSA Organizational Info:

- Program Committee Profile
- Regional Anchor Profile
- Management Plan for Sustainability and Efficiency of ISSA's Programmatic Operations
- Framework for Communication and Information Flow
- Channels for ISSA Members' Participation in Program Planning and Implementation

These efforts were intended to bring more clarity and coherence to ISSA's operations and governance, as well as to support members' participation and ownership-building.

Development of joint funding proposals and implementation of **Programmatic Partnership Projects** was another form of cooperation among members and with the ISSA Secretariat. More than half of the members have been engaged in development of new project proposals and/or in implementation of programmatic initiatives and partnership projects led by ISSA, or in which ISSA is a partner, carried out both with funding from OSF and with funding from other sources. Unfortunately some of the proposals submitted were not approved.

IV.1.2. Membership: NGO Development and Professional Development

Capacity building among its members is at the core of ISSA's work. ISSA and its members remain committed to self-improvement, acknowledging that development never stops. ISSA continued during 2011 to provide its members with **notifications of opportunities** for professional development - from new relevant resources available to opportunities for courses, trainings, and international conferences, which would help members develop new skills and network with other organizations and potential donors.

Professional development funds (PDF) were available to those members who served as Program Committee members and Regional Anchors. Members were invited to apply for the funds corresponding to the positions they served during 2011. All applications were approved by the Secretariat and reports were collected by the end of the year. These funds were highly appreciated and put to good use. A chart presented in an annex shows the kind of professional development activities for which members used the funds. Overall the funds have been used for:

- Participating to trainings, conferences, international meetings in the area of ECD
- Participating to trainings for expanding more specific skills: web design, English language, leadership.

- Organizing trainings for and with NGO staff for strengthening their expertise in working with ISSA Quality Resource Pack
- Purchasing books
- Purchasing relevant software/equipment to support the development of new professional skills.

IV.1.3. Reputation of the ISSA Network Strengthened Internationally

The network's visibility and credibility continued to be strengthened in 2011. This continues to be a service highly requested and valued by the members. In addition to the international meetings to which ISSA was invited which are mentioned under Goal I and Goal II (see above), the following are also worth noting:

- ISSA was invited to attend the Hungarian EU Presidency Conference ***Early Childhood: Excellence and Equity in Early Childhood Education and Care***, Budapest, February 21-22, 2011. The Program Director and the Executive Director attended.
- The chapter co-authored by three representatives of the network – Dawn Tankersley (ISSA Program Consultant), Ulviya Mijkailova (Azerbaijan) and Gerda Sula (Albania) - was finalized for being included in the book ***Policy Issues in the Early Years*** which was published by Sage in early 2012.
- ISSA was invited to send a representative to an international conference, ***More Education. More Growth. More Justice - On our way to an education strategy for German development policy***, organized in early March 2011 by BMZ (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development) and GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit/ Development Policy Forum), with the purpose to discuss and get feedback on Germany's draft education strategy. ISSA was represented by Zorica Trikić (Serbia) and a report was made available to members on the Online Community under Network News.
- Representatives from several ISSA member organizations attended and presented during the **Word Forum on Early Care and Education**, organized in May in Hawaii. Tatjana Vonta (Slovenia) and Cornelia Cincilei (Moldova) presented on the ISSA Principles. Tatjana Vonta also presented in a session which showcased all the international programs inspired by the Head Start Program in the US.

IV.2. Enabling Knowledge Creation and Dissemination; Supporting Collaborative Communities

With financial support from Bernard van Leer Foundation, ISSA and DECET have been developing a framework for cooperation, which includes developing mechanisms for joint knowledge creation and advocacy, joint fundraising, and building online learning communities to support the work of Special Interest Groups (SIG), with participants from both networks. This partnership envisages closer cooperation at the level of the two networks' Secretariats and at the level of individual network members; it aims not only at reaching common program/advocacy goals, but also at supporting sustainability, capacity and enhanced reach of both networks. More details on the ISSA/DECET cooperation are included in the section on Goal I above. While working with DECET colleagues on developing a framework for closer cooperation, ISSA also began exploring tools for knowledge management and online collaboration/learning.

During the summer of 2010 the structure of the **ISSA Online Community** (www.issa.nl/oc) was developed on Joomla and in October 2010 the platform was launched and introduced to ISSA members, providing them the opportunity to register. The ISSA Online community provides members with a comprehensive tool for

communicating, sharing experiences, developing interest groups and partnerships on projects, as well as for accessing all resources developed within ISSA and being updated about news from the ECD world or from ISSA members. DECET members are still invited to join the ISSA platform, by joining SIGs and engaging in collaborative projects and exchanges with ISSA members. After placing the ISSA resources in a password-protected area accessible only to ISSA members (planned for early 2012), the platform will be opened to other professionals: partners in projects, participants in the online course and others who are interested. This is part of ISSA's sub-strategy for expanding its reach, which was approved in October 2011. As ISSA accepts more Affiliate Members and as it engages with more and more stakeholders from the region, the association is positioned to become a wider **ECD umbrella for the region**, around issues of quality, access and equity. This will enable ISSA to have stronger impact by supporting more stakeholders and practitioners, and as a result to reach out to more families and children. In addition to thematic meetings, conferences and other meetings, ISSA's online tools will be important mechanisms to engage with more and more practitioners and organizations, in order to facilitate sharing and peer-learning, thus expanding and deepening ISSA's reach.

ISSA's online platform has multiple functions, serving as:

- **Intranet** – internal communication tool for the network: a “living newsletter” with news from members, network news, news from outside the network, storing place for organizational info on ISSA and on members
- **Collaborative Tool** to support the work of Groups around common interest (in their language of choice) – collaboration and joint knowledge creation
- **Library of Resources** – Library of video clips supporting the ISSA Principles, Library of resources produced by ISSA, and Library of other relevant resources linked to ISSA Principles and the Strategic Goals.

In order to keep the ISSA Online Community open to members and close partners, a separate online tool was set up (also using Joomla), the **ISSA Online Courses**, which is open to participants enrolled in courses, and which has the following function:

- **Online Education** – to support online courses offered by ISSA or its members. The first course is the result of a project funded by IBM – **Teachers that Make a Difference**, a course for kindergarten teachers being piloted in 2011-2012 in English and Slovak. ISSA members may use the same portal to later run their own courses (in different languages).

IV.3. Planning and Evaluation

IV.3.1. Planning the 2011 Work Plan

Building upon consensus reached and information gathered during the October 2010 Meetings, the Secretariat and the Program Committee worked in the first two months of the year on the **Work Plan and Budget 2011**, which were fine-tuned during the February 2011 Meetings, when a Program Committee Meeting and a Board Meeting took place. The 2011 Work Plan and Budget were finalized after the February Meetings, following consultations with Program Committee members, with Regional Anchors, Board and OSF. The plan was voted by Council Members via electronic vote at the end of March.

ISSA's Work Plan 2011 was built within the Strategy Framework 2010 – 2012, in order to reach strategic goals and objectives developed and endorsed by the ISSA Council. All activities represent the need and ability of ISSA to implement its organizational mission in a changing environment and in the context of global economic downturn.

Activities were developed around the **four strategic goals**, all of which aim to promote **equity and access to quality education for all children in the ISSA region**, through support to ISSA member NGOs, active dialogue and cooperation with various stakeholders in ECD and raising awareness of the importance of the early years for an individual and for the society. In line with ISSA's mission, activities aimed at **building capacity among ISSA Member NGOs**, both as ECD experts/professionals and as strong entities of civil society. A degree of flexibility was built in, in order to be able to later include additional activities and to flexibly respond to new opportunities.

The Plan identified the following network-wide priorities:

- **Ensure that the ISSA network continues to be at the forefront of innovations:** Through partnership projects, new resources were continuously developed and offered to members. Support was offered to members to work with the recently finalized resources in ISSA's Resource Pack for Quality Pedagogy. It was envisaged that members would also be supported to develop new resources and expand expertise in the field of early education and care for children under 3, and to deliver high quality community based ECD services focusing on parenting programs. This priority was not met, due to limited time and capacity.
- **Support ISSA as a learning community:** As a professional umbrella association, ISSA supports Special Interest Groups working through an online community and during in-person meetings, forming consortia to apply for joint project and to develop new resources. Regional/thematic meetings ensured shared understanding of quality pedagogy and supported shared learning, along with Peer Mentoring, Member Exchanges and Technical Assistance.
- **Engage in activities which directly improve the lives of children and their chances for success in life:** Through several projects ISSA implements partnership projects *at country level*, in partnership with the member NGO and other stakeholders. Eventually the whole network benefits, when resources developed and lessons learnt in these projects are shared with all members.

These priorities were met through the following **Operational Mechanisms**:

- **Community Building:** promoting and sustaining values; linking ISSA's membership into a strong community around the ISSA Principles for Quality Pedagogy
- **Capacity Building:** generating new knowledge through collaborative initiatives; making new resources available and supporting their application in the network
- **Advocacy:** promoting the importance of investing in the quality of early years services
- **Convening and Network Representation:** partnership building; cooperation with other relevant networks; increasing visibility and credibility of the network and of individual members

Following discussions during the February 2011 Board Meeting and building on the fact that several challenges which had faced ISSA in the past had been solved (hiring new Program Director, clarifying role of different ISSA bodies, successful fundraising etc.), ISSA could now embark in a healthy cycle for planning-implementation-evaluation, using the following schedule: evaluation in the spring, planning in the summer, approving plans in the autumn, ready to start implementation in January.

IV.3.2. Evaluation Process

In order to inform the planning for 2012 and to collect information which is relevant both to ISSA as a professional umbrella and to OSF as partner/donor, a joint OSF/ISSA Data Survey was ran in the spring, using a template agreed upon after consultations with OSF and the Program Committee. The data collection survey focused on gathering information related to ISSA members' programmatic work, but also their opinion in relation to the services provided by ISSA in 2010 and to the services which they would like to receive from ISSA in 2012:

- Program activities related to 2010, including:
 - A. Advocacy Activities
 - B. Training/Technical Assistance/Consultancy Activities
 - C. Main projects implemented in 2010
 - D. Achievements/challenges in 2010 (including an evaluation of ISSA services provided to members)

- E. Context and Cooperation
 - Program activities related to 2011 (within this last section specific questions related to NGOs initiatives/activities under Goal II/Quality) and priorities for 2012

Given the high participation and commitment of members for submitting in time the questionnaire with all relevant data, results were collected and processed, as it was envisaged, before the June Program Committee Meeting, when a report with the preliminary results was presented. The detailed report was finalized before the Council Meeting in October 2011, when it was introduced to all ISSA members. The **Report on Program Activities of ISSA NGOs during 2010-2011 and Perspectives for 2012** is available as an Annex.

In the autumn an additional survey was ran to collect information about the NGOs' sources of funding and an additional report was prepared: **Summary of Financial Data from ISSA Member NGOs for 2010-2012**, presented as an Annex. Both reports were made available to ISSA members on ISSA's Online Community under Organizational Info.

The report on program activities has informed not only the development of the 2012 Work Plan, but also of the Quality Assurance and Improvement Strategy 2011-2014. Among other information, in the Report on Program Activities there is an overview of members' needs and contexts with regards to work on Quality, as well as their plans for future work.

IV.3.3. Planning for 2012

In addition to the Program Committee Meeting from February, in order to support implementation of the 2011 Work Plan and also to begin the planning for 2012, two additional **Program Committee Meetings** were organized, one in April and one in June.

The Program Committee meeting in April was organized taking advantage of the opportunity provided by the ISSA-DECET Exchange Seminar, where almost all Program Committee members participated.

The focus areas for discussions were:

- Working on defining ISSA's positioning statement regarding ECD, starting by reviewing and reflecting on documents elaborated in the past. (This initiative started at the February meeting and it was endorsed by all PC members as a priority)
- Approaching strategically the ISSA Quality Resource Pack (QRP) (including the Instrument for Assessment) for the next two-three years (a preparatory discussion for the June Program Committee Meeting) so that it better serves members' needs and also assures a common and enriched discourse on the network level.
- Reviewing the OSF-ISSA Data Collection Sheet (for serving the purposes of developing the 2012 Work Plan and ISSA's Strategy for Quality Assurance and Improvement).
- Preliminary planning of the "Sharing Innovations in the Network" session during October Meetings to make sure it is of high relevance to members.
- Recommendations of specific professional resources strongly connected with the content areas addressed by the thematic meetings.

The outcomes/agreed next steps of the meeting were:

1. ISSA positioning statement: developed document's structure and agreed on division of tasks.
2. Data survey: defined objectives of the data collection survey:
 - collecting relevant data about NGOs activity in 2010-2011 which should inform the upcoming strategic planning meeting in June
 - collecting relevant data about how the Quality Resource Pack has been and would be meaningful to be used by the NGOs in the following years for a more strategic plan on Quality – plan to be developed in June-July.

- Plan to finalize revised version of the data survey sheet by end of April, including feedback from OSF . The survey is planned to be run between 1-20 May.
3. Discussion on the Quality Resource Pack strategy: Started discussion on strategy for exploiting the QRP on the network level and also on national level by considering all resources in the pack. Discussions contributed greatly to developing questions for the data survey so that we get input from members. Key points of discussions: how to connect and use the continuums and the short instrument; how to develop a mechanism or to organize a process for reliability on quality.
 4. The PD will interview members in May and the questions in the interview will complement the data from the survey. Interviews will be carried out after the survey template is finalized.
 5. The June Program Committee meeting will rely on data collected in May for a better, realistic and relevant Quality strategy for the network and also for OSF. Data collected will play an important role.

All activities agreed upon during the April meeting were completed, with the exception of the following:

- ISSA positioning statement: the document's structure was developed and division of tasks agreed upon. Although this was a decision taken in February that such an initiative is of a great importance, there was lack of time for pursuing it combined with changing the composition of the Program Committee. The other priorities related to running the evaluation and starting the planning phase seemed more urgent and claimed high involvement and time. This initiative was postponed until the right time for developing such a core document.
- Running interviews with members during the month of May. This activity was no longer run since many of the questions in the Data Collection Survey were comprehensive enough for gathering relevant data related to NGOs' program activity.

The April meeting contributed a great deal to introducing a more complex perspective over ISSA's work around quality and also around how to better focus, prioritize and articulate ISSA's initiatives in terms of programs.

The Program Committee Meeting in June was organized in Istanbul with the new composition of the Program Committee: 7 members and Program Director as the Chair. The meeting was also attended by: Dawn Tankersley and Zorica Trikić as Program Consultants, Stephanie Olmore invited as an External Consultant, and ISSA's Executive Director, Liana Ghent.

The main objectives of the working meeting were:

- a. Development of the first draft of the ISSA 2012 Work Plan
- b. Development of the Quality Improvement and Assurance Strategy for the next years
- c. Planning the work of the Committee for the rest of the year and into 2012

The meeting started by familiarizing the new Program Committee members with the following documents:

1. *Strategy Framework 2010-2012* – ISSA Strategic Goals and Operational Mechanisms
2. A Report on Activities carried out in 2010 and 2011 to achieve strategic goals
3. Brief presentation of the report on the *OSF-ISSA Data Survey* – preliminary report
4. Short presentation of the purpose of the *Quality Improvement and Assurance Strategy* and documents to be considered when developing it;
5. Short presentation of the *Short Instrument* report

For working more effectively, two working groups were formed to draft the two planning documents and then all members contributed to their improvement. By the end of the 3 days meeting, both documents were finalized as a first draft, building on high participation and commitment.

The meeting has been an important step forward in many ways:

- a better informed discussion of Program Committee members around ISSA's activity in 2012 based on information provided by the Preliminary Report on ISSA Member NGOs' Programs in 2010-2011 and Perspectives for 2012.

- a more focused and articulated vision on how ISSA's Quality Resource Pack can be valued on the network level by having various inputs from Program Committee members coming from different regions and having more information about each organization in the network from the preliminary report.
- a clear ownership of both documents developed, by having all Program Committee members involved in their development either by being part of a small working group or by participating to the whole group discussion.

Before the two planning documents – **2012 Work Plan** and **Quality Improvement and Assurance Strategy 2011-2014** – were presented for review and vote during the Council Meeting in October 2011, the following consultation process took place between July - September 2011:

- ISSA's Regional Anchors consulted with members and collected answers based on specific questions
- The Secretariat had consultations with OSF colleagues
- Consultations with the ISSA Board took place once feedback from the members and from OSF was obtained.
- A final version of the documents was prepared with help from the Program Committee before October, and the documents were presented for review and vote by the Council.

After the October meetings, the ISSA Secretariat finalized negotiations of the 2012 General Support Grant Contract, and implementation of the Work Plan was ready to start, as envisaged, in January 2012, with all documents in place.

IV.4. Governance: Council and Board Matters

Meetings: During 2011, ISSA organized a Board Meeting in February in Budapest and another Board Meeting in October, prior to the Council Meeting. Minutes of both Board Meetings are available on the ISSA Online Community, in the Organizational Info section. The Board conducted its business also via conference calls and email consultations. Some of the most important decisions of the Board included the appointment of new Program Committee Members and Regional Anchors, and preparing for the Council Meeting.

The revisions to the **ISSA Statutes**, to reflect decisions in the recent strategic planning process were finalized during the October 2010 Council Meeting. The revised Statutes were registered in The Netherlands in early 2011. During the beginning of 2011 there was an in-depth process to clarify ISSA's **operational and governance framework**- with several documents resulting from the process.

The role and profile of the **Program Committee** was clarified at the end of 2010 and finalized in early 2011. The call for application was launched on 17th of March with the deadline on 20th of April. 7 applications were received and the Board decided to approve all of them. The new Program Committee started its mandate on 15th of June and its first meeting was between 23-25 June in Istanbul, when all members attended.

Between January-June 2011, ISSA's **previous Program Committee** provided input on several program matters: 2011 Work Plan, templates for members to apply for Technical Assistance and Member Exchange, evaluation of applications for Technical Assistance and Member Exchange, reviewing the OSF-ISSA data collection survey, defining the concept of ISSA-DECET 2012 Conference. In the second half of year, the **new ISSA Program Committee** participated to the following activities: development of Quality Assurance and Improvement Strategy, development and of the first draft of 2012 Work Plan, contributing to fine-tuning the ISSA-DECET 2012 Conference Concept, revision of planning documents based on feedback from members.

The position of **Regional Anchors** was clarified during 2010 and finalized in the first months of 2011. In early 2011 the **previous Regional Anchors** consulted members in their sub-regions on possible locations for upcoming ISSA events in 2011 and 2012. As a result the Program Committee and the Board decided on location for the two Thematic Meetings (Turkey and Slovenia) and the October 2011 Council Meeting and satellite events (Bulgaria).

The Call for Applications for new RAs was launched on March 17th with the deadline on 20th of April. Since just one application was received, according to the regulations approved by the Board, for each of the other three regions member organizations were appointed in alphabetical order of their country to serve for the coming mandate: June-December 2011. For the second half of the year, the following NGOs served as Regional Anchors:

ISSA Sub-Region	Regional Anchor June-December 2011
<i>Central-Eastern Europe/new EU Members:</i> Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia	Step by Step Program Foundation Bulgaria
<i>South-Eastern Europe:</i> Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia	Step by Step Center Albania
<i>Caucasus and Western CIS:</i> Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine	Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation (USSF)
<i>Central Asia, Mongolia and Azerbaijan:</i> Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan	Center for Innovations in Education (CIE) Azerbaijan

The following main tasks were performed by the **new Regional Anchors** in the second half of the year:

1. Network Building/Strengthen ISSA as learning community

- Facilitate better communication with and among members:
 - (a) Contribute **information from the sub-region** on ISSA's Online Community and external site.
 - (b) assist them if necessary and ensure **all members in the sub-region have signed up on the ISSA Online Community**. Conduct informal tutorials online (virtual tours) for all members in the sub-region, to explain what resources may be found there.
- Prepare and facilitate the *Regional Meeting*, ½ day on the morning of October 27, Bulgaria. Develop the agenda beforehand after consultations with members, facilitate the meeting, prepare report on results of the discussions
- Prepare and facilitate sessions on *Sharing Innovations in the Network* during the Council Meeting, 1 day on October 28, Bulgaria

2. Represent interests of members in the sub-region

- **Provide support in the development of ISSA's 2012 Work Plan and Quality Framework** to the Program Committee, Board and the Secretariat, in order to facilitate members' input. Ensure that priorities for the sub-region are reflected in the documents, based on feedback from members during informal consultations over the draft. Consultations with members were carried out over skype and email between mid-July and end-August and a **Consolidated Report** with the feedback was sent in September. During additional consultations at the end of the year, RAs collected information from NGOs willing to host ISSA meetings during 2012.

During the Regional Meetings organized in October 2011, members of the sub-regions agreed on the Regional Anchors for 2012:

ISSA Sub-Region	Regional Anchor - 2012
<i>Central-Eastern Europe/new EU Members:</i> Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia	Step by Step Center for Education and Professional Development (CEPD), Romania
<i>South-Eastern Europe:</i> Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia	Kosovo Education Center (KEC), Kosovo
<i>Caucasus and Western CIS:</i> Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine	Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation (USSF), Ukraine
<i>Central Asia, Mongolia and Azerbaijan:</i> Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan	Foundation for Education Support Initiatives (FEIS), Kyrgyzstan

Key issues on the agenda of the **Council Meeting** October 2011 included:

- Board elections 2012, which were prepared by the Nominations Committee. See the new composition of the ISSA Board on the Online Community under Organizational Info.
- Review and vote on the Work Plan 2012 and the Quality Assurance and Improvement Strategy
- Decision on some Membership Issues; revision of Internal Regulations, approval of strategies for expanding ISSA's membership and reach
- Regional Meetings
- Sessions under Sharing Ideas and Experiences in the ISSA network

A Task Force was set up to prepare recommendations for the ISSA Board on self-financing/income generation. An additional Task Force was set up to finalize the draft Membership Information Sheet, which outlines members' rights and responsibilities. The Council Meeting Minutes are available on the Online Community, under ISSA Organizational Info, and a summary of the main decisions related to membership issues was posted under Network News, along with the evaluation summary of the meeting. The Sharing Day was considered highly successful: members had the opportunity to share and learn from each other, both on content/programmatic issues, and on issues related to organizational development and sustainability.

IV.5. Communications and Publications

At the end of 2010/early 2011 ISSA worked on streamlining communication, and developed a **Framework for Communication and Information Flow**, available on the Online Community/ISSA Organizational Info. The document was developed with the aim to provide more clarity to members in a user-friendly document.

Here is a summary of the progress in 2011:

- The ISSA Secretariat continued to send out *monthly program updates* to the Board and Council by uploading them on the ISSA Online Community, as well as to OSF as part of the reporting requirements. They summarize the latest developments, as well as provide information about upcoming events, resources, etc.
- In addition to what is included in the updates, the Secretariat regularly informed the network about *relevant events and program/advocacy/organizational development resources*. The Online Community became the main tool for these updates and the number of members using it is increasing.
- ISSA continues to update the *Latest News* section on the *external website* and on the Online Community. This includes a permanent section, *News from ISSA's Core Members*.

- The *ISSA Online Community* - a Knowledge Management /Learning Management System—started to serve as ISSA’s new *Intranet* (with content management functions), as well as a platform for specific groups and online courses. Program Committee and Regional Anchors groups are already set up and their activity is slowly transferred there. A Board Group was also set up, as well as several Special Interest Groups: Professional Development, Social Inclusion, Creation of Video Clips, Quality, Community-based ECD – however, these groups are not all very active yet.
- The vast majority of printed and electronic ISSA publications were released in both English and Russian. The members have been informed about the development of new resources via email and asked to visit the Online Community library to access them.
- Given the intense focus on internal communication and other processes, there was no time to prepare an external *Newsletter*. The functions of the newsletter have been replaced by the Online Community (for internal purposes) and the Latest News on the external site (for external purposes).

The year of 2011 was very rich in terms of **Publications**, which the ISSA Secretariat, under the coordination of the Network Manager, was successful to edit, translate and publish. Several of these were developed and published as ISSA publications, while a large number were related to the RGSi project, where ISSA’s role was to coordinate their translation, editing, design and layout. Some of these are available in print, others only electronically; some have been uploaded on the Online Community or the external site, others have been disseminated as hard copies through the RGSi partnership project, or via the network of ISSA members. A list of publications produced in 2011 is presented as an Annex.

IV.6. Resource Mobilization: Fundraising and Income Generation

While being able to rely on the General Support Grant from OSF for a significant part of its operational and programmatic costs, ISSA pursued other sources of funding with some degree of success. ISSA continues to be successful in securing its funds from a variety of sources: foundations, international agencies, governmental sources, and to some extent also own income through sales (albeit sporadic). Membership fees continue to represent a small percentage of the budget, which means that services to members are subsidized through the OSF grant or through other sources. With the funds raised and by using a portion of the savings accumulated during the last years, all the 2011 budget was covered, and several partnership projects continue into 2012, so some funding for the following year is also already secured.

Grant Proposals: In 2010 negotiations began with the Bernard van Leer Foundation and Roma Education Fund on a grant to supplement capacity-building activities in the A Good Start project. The proposal was submitted by REF in partnership with ISSA in March and it was approved. The additional support is provided for one year from June 2011 to June 2012. The funding for activities coordinated by ISSA and its member NGOs comes up to 115,000 EURO. The proposal focuses on 4 communities, one in each of the four countries (Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, and Slovakia), out of a total of 16 communities involved in the project. Through this supplementary grant ISSA’s members will be able to conduct additional training and mentoring, in order to strengthen the ECD component of the EU-funded project, which was under-stressed and under-budgeted in the initial proposal.

EU-funding for 2011 was also secured through the RGSi project, through a partnership agreement with UNICEF, working in close cooperation with ISSA’s members in Serbia and Romania, as well as with other RGSi partners: OSF, UNICEF local offices, REF. Altogether the funding secured came up to approximately 150,000 Euros (paid in two installments), some of it covering also costs for staff of ISSA and staff of member NGOs, thus filling gaps in the budget for such costs. It is uncertain yet if and how the RGSi partnership will continue into 2012 – negotiations will continue with UNICEF and other project partners, in case more EU funds become available.

In January ISSA decided to apply for an EU grant under the **Life Long Learning Program–Comenius Multilateral Network Project**. ISSA led the development of a proposal involving 3 ISSA members (Croatia, Slovenia, Slovakia)

and 7 partners from Western Europe (most of them DECET members). The proposal was successfully submitted on 28 February, but unfortunately it was not approved. The proposal received very high scores on issues related to content: (4 or 4,5 points out of 5) on relevance, innovative character, quality of the consortium, European added value and impact. The following areas received very low scores (1 or 2 out of 5): quality of the work programme, the cost-benefit ratio, dissemination and exploitation of results. These low scores show that more time and more consultations among partners are needed to develop a project proposal, with a better division of tasks among the partners. The valuable feedback provided in the rejection letter encouraged ISSA to work at the end of the year and throughout January 2012 on reviewing the proposal and re-submitting it in early February, 2012.

ISSA also joined a consortium led by the University of East London for an **LLP Comenius Application – Studies and Comparative Research**, focusing on Assistants and Paraprofessionals in Early Childhood Education and Training. The application was submitted by 31 March and unfortunately was unsuccessful. Another rejected proposal was the one led by the University of Montenegro, through the work of ISSA's member there, submitted to the **TEMPUS Program**, in which ISSA and several member NGOs were partners.

Consulting: At the beginning of the year, ISSA successfully delivered consulting services to Aga Khan Foundation in Kyrgyzstan by delivering a training to authors of children's books. ISSA also provided consultancy through a small project to WFD, the consulting firm which is the intermediary for the partnership with IBM. A consultancy contract with WFD was also facilitated for Wide Open School/Slovakia and Ec Pec Foundation/Hungary. In partnership with ACEV ISSA began providing consultancy to UNICEF and the Ministry of Education in Turkey; the project will continue into 2012.

Sales: With in-kind support from OSF, through the work of Martin Greenwald, children's book sales continued, bringing small revenues to ISSA. A license for 4 titles was sold to AKF Kyrgyzstan as part of the training offered by ISSA in early 2011, for publication in partnership with FEIS, ISSA's member in that country. Through a service contract with IBM, in partnership with Wide Open School/Slovakia, ISSA is offering its online course, which represents an additional source of revenues.

IV.7. Financial Management

In May-June 2011, ISSA successfully conducted an Audit for each of its two entities, ISSA Netherlands and ISSA Hungary. Quarterly financial reports were prepared and submitted to OSF and to the ISSA Board. The 2011 financial report is presented as an Annex. Financial reports were prepared and submitted on time for ongoing partnership projects: *A Good Start* and *Roma Good Start Initiative*.

IV.8. ISSA Secretariat's Human Resources

From mid-May, Laura Liliom, Office Manager, who went on maternity leave, was replaced with Judit Levenda, the new Finance and Administration Officer, who joined the other three staff persons: the Executive Director, the Program Director and the Network Manager. In order to hire the new staff member, ads were placed in the media and the position advertised through different channels, followed by interviews and final selection. In order to successfully implement the 2011 Work Plan (including activities carried over from 2010), the Secretariat divided tasks among the staff available and contracted two part-time Program Consultants for programmatic work, Dawn Tankersley and Zorica Trikić. These consultants have some involvement in general program development and specific tasks in partnership projects.

Sources of Funding for Activities carried out under Goal IV: OSF General Support Grant and other funding from grants and sales.

3. GENERAL REMARKS AND REFLECTIONS ON ISSA'S ACTIVITY IN 2011 - CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

General Overview

ISSA was very successful in overcoming some of the major bottlenecks which challenged the organization in 2010: hiring and training a new Program Director, conducting a timely strategic planning process and clarifying/strengthening organizational structures to ensure member engagement and ownership. Overall, program evaluation, implementation and planning, as well as all other organizational processes (membership-related activities, governance, financial management, communications and fundraising) are running smoothly. In some of these areas the organization is still overstretched. The greatest challenge now is to balance the efforts invested in these ongoing processes with the efforts and investments required by growth. Some of the areas in which the organization has already started to grow or in which it could potentially grow include:

- Using on a large scale the online platform for communication, collaboration and expanding the reach
- Expanding the membership
- Developing further these programs: education for social justice, birth-three and parenting programs
- Rolling out the work with the Quality Resource Pack inside the network
- Expanding ISSA's publishing activities (under-developed at the moment)
- Sales of services and resources with the aim to generate income (mission related social enterprise)

For the October 2011 Board Meeting the Secretariat prepared an overview of ISSA's current activities in the context of the 2011 and 2012 Work Plans, with an analysis of where the organization is running well, where it is overstretched, what is underdeveloped and what has the greatest potential for growth, taking advantage of existing opportunities. During 2012, further consultations with the Board will continue, as well as discussions in the strategic planning process, with the aim to find ways to most effectively use available financial and human resources, balancing successful ongoing operations with investment in growth.

3.1. Evaluation and Planning

In January 2011, the 2011 Work Plan was still in process to be finalized. The delays in finalizing the plan during 2010 were due to the fact that ISSA functioned without a Program Director for a large part of the year. The first draft was developed after the October meeting together with the Program Committee members and waited to be further developed during the Program Committee Meeting and Board meeting in February 2011. After both meetings, the Work Plan passed through some adjustments and was approved and voted electronically at the end of March. The fact that the planning phase for 2011 took rather long led to some delays in implementation (fortunately very small) and in finalizing agreements with OSF on the 2011 Grant.

During the February Board meeting plans were made for the following **cycle of programming for the organization** during 2011: running an evaluation phase during spring 2011, planning for 2012 in June–October 2011, approval and vote during October 2011, negotiating the grant with OSF by December 2011, implementation for 2012 starting with January 2012. This cycle was successfully put into action. During March–May the evaluation phase was completed including the development of a new Data Collection Survey Sheet reaching a broad range of aspects related to NGOs programs and projects run in 2010–2011 and prospects for 2012, processing the data and preparing a preliminary report. The data highly informed the Program Committee in developing the plans for 2012 and also for articulating a quality strategy framework for the next three years. During June–July, the first draft of **ISSA 2012 Work Plan** and a **Quality Assurance and Improvement Strategy 2011–2014** was developed by the Program Committee under the leadership of the Program Director and the Executive Director, and sent for consultations to the Board and (through the Regional Anchors) also to the Council Members. Both these phases –

the evaluation and the planning – were carried out with high participation and involvement of the Program Committee.

In the second half of 2011, and during the October Board and Council Meetings ISSA began to plan the process of developing the 2013-2015 Strategy Framework, building upon evaluation and involving members. The plans are summarized in a chart outlining the Strategic Planning Process, which is presented as an annex.

During the last months of 2011, the ISSA Board, Staff and Council were actively engaged in the ISSA Review commissioned by OSF, working with the consultant hired for the process and with OSF staff. It is envisaged that the report will be helpful in informing the development of ISSA's 2013-2015 Strategy Framework and the ongoing partnership with OSF.

3.2. Implementation

According to the 2011 Work Plan, there were three network priorities:

- **Ensure that the ISSA network continues to be at the forefront of innovations:** Support was offered to members to work with the recently finalized resources in ISSA's Resource Pack for Quality Pedagogy. It was also envisaged that members will be supported to develop new resources and expand expertise in the field of early education and care for children under 3, and to deliver high quality community based ECD services focusing on parenting programs. This however could not be accomplished in 2011. Through new partnership projects, new resources were continuously developed and offered to members.
- **Support ISSA as a learning community:** As a professional umbrella association, ISSA supported Special Interest Groups working through an online community and during in-person meetings, forming consortia to apply for joint project and to develop new resources. Thematic Meetings ensured shared understanding of quality pedagogy and supported shared learning, along with Member Exchanges and Technical Assistance.
- **Engage in activities which directly improve the lives of children and their chances for success in life:** through several projects ISSA implemented partnership projects *at country level*, in partnership with the member NGO and other stakeholders. Eventually the whole network benefits, when resources developed and lessons learnt in these projects are shared with all members.

In the first area, there were things which were initially planned, which however ISSA could not accomplish during implementation. While there was a strong focus on Quality, the other areas have not received much attention. Although when the Work Plan was developed there was a planned intention to develop and implement a project on early education for children under 3, the initiative was postponed for a later joint initiative together with OSF. This is likely to be planned in 2012 for the following years. Also a project on Parenting was planned to be developed during 2011 by applying to an OSF Innovative Grant. Although a Call for Expression of Interest to ISSA NGOs for developing a joint proposal with ACEV on Parenting Programs was launched in April and 11 countries expressed interest (Latvia, Serbia, Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo, Mongolia, Slovakia, Croatia, Montenegro, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Poland), the application was postponed for the next year because of lack of time for preparing a project proposal to OSF, while having a large number of other activities running in 2011. A meeting around the Parenting Initiative was organized during the October Meetings in Sofia, with interested ISSA members and representatives of ACEV and OSF, and as a result of the meeting a capacity building activity, offered to all ISSA members on the Fathers Support Program, was introduced in the 2012 Work Plan to be funded by the General Support Grant from OSF.

All other areas planned under the three priorities were highly addressed by the projects and activities implemented during the year.

As far as overall implementation is concerned, some general reflections can be made in terms of analyzing what lessons were learnt and what opportunities may be considered in the near future:

- The implementation of the *Smooth Transitions* project which was rolling on from 2010 was thoroughly analyzed during Program Committee and Board Meetings when the decision of closing it was taken. The main reasons for this decision was due to low motivation and involvement of the NGOs in carrying out the project as well as to the fact that already other projects in the international arena had come up with data related to the same topics. The Smooth Transition Project was an opportunity to reflect and learn useful lessons about consortium projects in the network, partners' involvement and leadership.
- The important progress made this year towards the completion of the *Quality Resource Pack* (finalizing the Assessment Instrument research and the tool itself, finalizing all the resources in both languages) raised the awareness of the great potential for professional growth and further community-building that such a resource pack offers to the network, and what a powerful capital to be "exploited" outside the network it is. The areas of online education, professional learning communities and online collaboration present strong opportunities.
- Involvement of members in the implementation of the Work Plan is crucial: by being part of various task forces (Program Committee, Regional Anchor), by being a beneficiary (applicant to Member Exchanges and Technical Assistance) or by expressing interest to contribute to the implementation of a specific activity (such as enriching the ISSA Online Video Library). The more participation, the better the results.

3.3. Human Resources and Fundraising

The 2011 Work Plan was implemented with a budget of approximately 900,000 Euros. In terms of workload, the ISSA Secretariat has carefully analyzed the capacity of the office to run all the operations, processes and programing, and assessed to what extent the office can be involved in new initiatives and opportunities that might come up during the year. The main reason for making such an assessment was especially to not endanger the implementation of the 2011 Work Plan and also to make it as effective as possible. That is why, for carrying out the already planned activities, ISSA Secretariat has hired two program consultants for specific tasks related to ISSA Work Plan 2011, using the funds available through the different grants.

Although the implementation and operational processes have been strengthened, still, for the ISSA Secretariat one of the biggest challenges during the first half of 2011 was to balance the efforts of program implementation and organizational processes, with the need for fundraising for 2012 and beyond, which for any organization is a crucial aspect of sustainability. Even if ISSA were to hire more external consultants for writing project proposals, huge involvement of the Secretariat is needed for developing a solid project proposal (specific knowledge is needed). The challenge comes also from the fact that there are calls for proposals that have a short deadline and mobilizing members/partners to join a consortium, participate to the development of the proposal and articulate a clear concept is a slow time-consuming process, which makes it difficult to meet the deadlines for submissions.

Nevertheless, the ISSA Secretariat has been involved this year in submitting three proposals to the European Commission, one as the main applicant and two as a partner in the consortium. In addition, a successful proposal was submitted to the Bernard van Leer Foundation in partnership with REF for the AGS Project, and another successful proposal to UNICEF for RGSi.

Given all other work in 2011, the Secretariat did not have sufficient time and human resources to further develop ISSA's income generating potential: selling children's story books and activity kits, selling training and consultancy etc. Through consultations with the Board, and the work of the Task Force established in October 2011, a plan will be developed for marketing ISSA's resources and expertise for the purpose of income generation to ensure a regular source of income for ISSA and for members, building on the potential available in the network.

With regards to proposal writing, for 2012 the Secretariat will work with the Program Committee to review, as much as possible in advance, the open or potential (those that may repeat from last year) Calls for Proposals from

the European Commission and decide which should be a strategic priority. Consultations will continue with the ISSA Board to find efficient ways to balance the focus on organizational processes and program implementation with the efforts and investment in fundraising, given the available human and financial resources.

3.4. Administration

ISSA runs its operations through two legal entities: ISSA Netherlands (registered as international association) and its owned-subsiidiary ISSA Hungary (registered as non-profit company). The bulk of operations are run through ISSA Netherlands, while the entity in Hungary is used primarily for being able to hire personnel and have an office based in the country. Having two legal entities entails a rather complex set of operations, with two financial audits, two sets of tax advisors, legal counsels and accountants, as well as a framework of contractual agreements between the two entities, all of which take a considerable amount of money, time and effort to manage.

Having more and more partnership projects entails having more and more grant contracts with donors, partnership agreements with project partners (ISSA's member organizations and other partners) and service contracts with individual consultants, which again take a considerable amount of time and effort to manage. During 2011 ISSA had approximately 70 contracts to be managed, related strictly to grants and program implementation (i. e. not including contracts with service providers).

With a higher and higher number of contracts and funding sources, financial management continues to be a big challenge for the organization, especially since ISSA does not have a Finance Manager position.

Beginning with 2011, the General Support Grant from OSF comes to ISSA from OSI New York, which has brought about a change that took some time to adjust to: – ISSA is no longer able to sub-grant funds from this grant. This means that contracts with member NGOs for these funds can now be either partnership agreements or consultancy contracts.

In the second half of 2011 ISSA received an invitation from International Child Development Institute in Leiden/The Netherlands to consider moving its offices to the Children's Rights House in Leiden, where ICDI also has its office. The building is owned by Utopa Foundation. ISSA began exploring this opportunity, by analyzing pros and cons of different scenarios for office location, exploring the issue from several angles: financial considerations, legal aspects, opportunities for partnerships and fundraising, as well as symbolic perspectives and perceptions. Members were surveyed with the help of Regional Anchors, and feedback was collected to inform the Board's decision. The Board decided to host its March 2012 meeting in Leiden, in order to be able to have discussions with ICDI and Utopa Foundation before it finalizes its decision.

3.5. Communications and Organizational Culture

One of the biggest challenges in 2011 was to develop a new organizational culture around communication and collaboration in the ISSA network: moving from conducting work primarily via email and in-person meetings, to utilizing an online platform for sharing information, communication and collaboration. ISSA now has its **Online Community (OC)**. Although the new platform was received with enthusiasm and many members have already signed up there, the communication and exchanges are still rather slow. Such a tool has great potential to support effective and efficient program implementation and networking, however it is a process that requires time to get to high results.

The first steps have been made by posting on the Online Community news, organizational information and resources that are of interest and inviting members to go there to access them. A second strategy was to move the activity of three governing bodies online: Board, Program Committee and Regional Anchors. A third step was to

ask Regional Anchors to offer informal tutorials to members, to post news from their sub-regions, and to encourage in a peer-to-peer manner wider use of the tool.

There has been a degree of success in 2011:

- It is easy to track how many members are online at different times of the day; several are regular visitors
- A high number of hits for articles/news/resources in the library shows what members found most useful
- Regional Anchors and some members themselves began uploading news on News from Members
- Several new special interest groups was set up for the ESJ project
- By the end of the year, there were more than 100 persons from the ISSA network signed up.

Still, this initiative is only at the beginning and it is expected that in 2012 a new phase will be reinforced, as plans are made to make more efficient use of the online platform for implementing activities included in the 2012 Work Plan and the Quality Assurance and Improvement Strategy 2011-2014. ISSA's online tools will be important mechanisms to engage with more and more practitioners and organizations, in order to facilitate sharing and peer-learning, thus expanding and deepening ISSA's reach.

ANNEXES

Annex I	Quality Assurance and Improvement Strategy 2011-2014
Annex II	Work Plan 2012
Annex III	Report on Program Activities of ISSA NGOs during 2010-2011 and Perspectives for 2012
Annex IV	Summary of Financial Data from ISSA Member NGOs for 2010-2012
Annex V	List of Publications produced by ISSA in 2011
Annex VI	Professional Development Activities of ISSA members using Professional Development Funds
Annex VII	Process for Developing ISSA's 2013-2015 Strategy Framework
Annex VIII	Financial Report 2011

LIST OF OTHER RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

TITLE	AVAILABLE ON
Resources in the Quality Resource Pack	Online Community Library/Resources Developed by ISSA Goal II
Report on the ISSA/DECET Member Exchange Seminar	Online Community (OC)/Network News
Conclusions and Recommendations from the Thematic Meeting on Pre-service Training	ISSA External Website/Latest News and OC/Network News
Overall Concept for Internal Planning of ISSA/DECET Joint Conference 2012	OC/Network News
Revised Organizational Chart	OC/ISSA Organizational Info
Management Plan for Sustainability and Efficiency of ISSA's Programmatic Operations	OC/ISSA Organizational Info
Framework for Communication and Information Flow	OC/ISSA Organizational Info
Channels for ISSA Members' Participation in Program Planning and Implementation	OC/ISSA Organizational Info
Program Committee Profile	OC/ISSA Organizational Info
Regional Anchor Profile	OC/ISSA Organizational Info
Board Meeting Minutes February 2011	OC/ISSA Organizational Info
Board Meeting Minutes October 2011	OC/ISSA Organizational Info
Tasks for Regional Anchors June-December 2011	OC/Regional Anchors Group
Council Meeting Minutes October 2011	OC/ISSA Organizational Info
Decisions on Membership Issues and Evaluation Summary of October 2011 Council Meeting	OC/Network News