

# ISSA Annual Report

2010



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 2009-2012 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 OSI 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 OSI in the CEE/CIS region. Finally, ISSA's strategic goals are meant to assure that ISSA's members are able to work on pursuing the common mission, and are strong NGOs both in their institutional capacity and in professional/content expertise.

ISSA's work during 2010 was guided by the **four strategic goals** of the 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 2010 Work Plan included:

**A. Ensure that the network continues to be at the forefront of innovations - Develop new resources and strengthen members capacity to work with them:**

Goal I

- New resources were developed in the Roma Pilot Project led by REF
- Education for Social Justice Project with CIP Serbia – mapping of expertise in the network

Goal II

- Build updated shared understanding on Quality Pedagogy in ECD - update and/or develop new resources related to ISSA's *Principles for Quality Pedagogy* and a Resource Pack of Supporting Materials on Quality Pedagogy
- Began development of an online course and strengthen the network's capacity to use IT and video libraries for professional development of early years professionals
- Peer Mentoring and Technical Assistance within the network

Goal III

- Map network's expertise and bring innovative resources/ideas into the network in the area of Community Based Education – Smooth Transitions Project

**B. Act as ECD clearing house for the region**

Goal I and IV

- Mapped ECD resources available within the network and more widely within the region – Online Databases of ECD resources
- Act as convener/catalyst – co-organizer of an international conference, disseminator of resources through newsletter, website and other channels
- Support peer mentoring and exchanges in the regional and international learning community – regional meetings and participation in international professional development opportunities.
- Capacity builder - provide ISSA members with opportunities for taking part in international initiatives
- Increase visibility and credibility of the network – marketing and communications
- Finalize publication *Early Childhood Programs as the Doorway to Social Cohesion: Application of Vygotsky's Ideas from an East-West Perspective* (based on papers from ECCERA 2007 Conference hosted by ISSA)

**C. Engage members and expand ISSA's reach**

Goal IV

- Actively and meaningfully engaged members – Members served on various Committees and on the ISSA Board, contribute as Consultants/Core Experts in programmatic initiatives and as Regional Anchors. Members also engage in partnership projects and peer learning.
- Organized three Regional Meetings for capacity building/shared understanding on program issues, shared learning, peer mentoring and horizontal exchanges
- Engaged and supported more civil society actors in order to have stronger impact at the national/regional level - ACEV/Turkey and Comenius Foundation/Poland actively involved in partnership projects and considering to join as members. Several other NGOs from the region engaged in partnership projects.
- Strengthened partnerships with relevant stakeholders – existing and new partnerships strengthened at regional and international level.

**D. Advocate for quality of provisions, increased access and higher investment in the early years**

Goal I

- Co-organized International Conference on Inclusive Approaches
- Strengthened network's ability to advocate for children excluded from quality services

Goal II

- Strengthened network's capacity to use the ISSA Principles as advocacy tool and to advocate for increased investment and access to quality provisions

**E. Engage in activities which directly work towards improving the lives of children and their chances for success in life - Projects at the country level, in partnership with member NGOs and other stakeholders**

Goal I

- Contribute to *Roma Pilot Project A Good Start* in partnership with Roma Education Fund and other partners - Hungary, Romania, Macedonia, Slovakia (2010-2012)

Goal III

- TACIS Project *Civil Society Partnership for Rural Children* – Kazakhstan (Aug 2008 - Aug 2010)

Goal IV

- Ensured the whole network benefits from country-level partnership projects, by sharing with all ISSA members resources developed and lessons learnt in implementation.

## **2. MAIN ACTIVITIES FOR REACHING STRATEGIC GOALS**

ISSA's work in 2010 was carried out within the framework of its Work Plan 2010, with 7 open grants from OSI and approximately 11 grants/contracts from non-OSI sources. The Work Plan included a number of initiatives which had not been finalized in 2009, and were rolled over into 2010 (especially under Goal II, primarily with funding from the OSI 2009 General Support Grant).

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

### **Overview of Progress under Goal I**

ISSA has increasingly positioned itself as a clearing house and advocate for access to quality ECD in the region and has intensified its efforts in working on Roma inclusion to ECD, directly affecting lives of children. Important relevant partnerships have been strengthened.

### **I.1 Mapping Project to Develop Online Databases of Human, Technical, Institutional ECDE Resources in the CEE/CIS Region.**

In the first quarter of 2010 ISSA finalized and launched the online Databases of Human, Technical, Institutional ECDE Resources in the CEE/CIS Region, a project funded by UNICEF, and carried out in partnership with ISSA members and other experts serving as national consultants. The Databases provide rich information about policies, resources, and initiatives in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS), which guarantee and promote the rights of young children. In addition to providing details with respect to human, technical, and institutional resources in 26 countries of the region, these Databases also include information on relevant policies and legislative frameworks, as well as information on whether these resources are involved in or prepared for disaster risk reduction and emergency response.

[www.issa.nl/issadatabases.html](http://www.issa.nl/issadatabases.html); User login name: [issadatabases@issa.hu](mailto:issadatabases@issa.hu); Password: user01.

Background and Rationale of the Mapping Project: Early childhood is a time of remarkable opportunity, when the foundation is laid for subsequent development, learning, and success throughout life. Statistical and research evidence reveal that a significant number of young children in the CEE/CIS region face critical risks. The region has a unique social and political context and a distinctive historical legacy. The period of political and economic transition, which began in the early 1990s, was accompanied by economic instability and decline, which in most countries led to dramatic decreases in the provision of basic services, eroding the region's strong tradition of public childcare and other social services. The restabilization of their economies was not matched by comparable advances in the provision of basic services. Inadequate public investment in the health care, education, and protection of young children, together with poor system capacities and the decentralization of accountabilities, present long-term implications for child development, school attendance and completion, social stability and cohesion, welfare and wellbeing of families and national development in general.

Across the region, a great deal needs to be done both in terms of designing comprehensive early childhood strategies and of ensuring their effective implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. ISSA and UNICEF welcome the fact that more and more development partners and governments in the region are beginning to pay closer attention to holistic policies and programs for young children. Greater attention is being directed to child poverty and its implications for the young, as well as the uniquely intertwined health, development, and protection needs of infants and young children.

In the last two decades the region has experienced a number of emergencies, with several countries remaining prone to new emergencies. An emergency is defined as a major event/hazard which disrupts the normal functioning of a society – for instance a natural disaster, armed conflict or other complex crises. “Children between the ages of 0 and 8 represent the highest percentage of those affected by today’s global emergencies.”<sup>1</sup> Early childhood is the most sensitive developmental phase and emergencies can pose fundamental challenges for young children; their needs and rights are often violated and/or neglected, with serious consequences for their survival,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Path of Most Resilience: Early Childhood Care and Development in Emergencies – Principles and Practice*, working paper of The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development and INEE

growth, development, and protection. In order to ensure that there is adequate preparedness for emergency situations, it is critical to know what human and institutional resources can be mobilized, as well as what coordination mechanisms are in place or need to be established in the ECD and education sectors.

While a great deal of pertinent information and evidence has been generated in the region by a number of agencies, the information base is scattered, and efforts to address young children are fragmentary and isolated and do not result in cross-fertilization or sustainable change. ECD players at the regional and national levels have limited knowledge about available resources. These Databases are intended to be a critical source of information to address this gap and to enable efforts to promote coordination and cooperation among key ECD players.

These Databases aim to:

- Identify and document existing human, technical and institutional resources in ECD and education in the CEE/CIS region and make them accessible to a wide range of stakeholders.
- Facilitate exchange of best practices, shared learning, increased coordination, and cooperation among the key players in ECD and education from different sectors in each country and in the region.
- Build capacity and promote the use of ECD and education expertise from and within the region, simultaneously reducing dependence on external resources.
- Strengthen the emergency coordination capacities in the region and further develop capacity for cluster implementation, by providing local actors relevant information and resources.
- Develop stronger linkages between regular and emergency programmatic work and contribute to the efforts to mainstream emergency issues into regular programs in order to ensure adequate preparedness for and response to emergencies.

The Databases are aimed at international and regional agencies, multi-lateral organizations, donor agencies, international NGOs, national civil society organizations, academics and researchers, early childhood practitioners, and teacher training institutions, as well as government decision makers from the education, social protection, and finance sectors.

These Databases include information about countries in CEE/CIS where either UNICEF or ISSA or both have members/offices<sup>2</sup>, including those that have joined the EU. Such a variety of experiences provides wider options for all stakeholders to access relevant expertise and expand opportunities to consult with peers from countries that are undergoing similar social and political changes. There are four Databases:

1. *Human Resources*: this Database lists experts, consultants, and trainers on relevant topics, mentioning their areas of expertise, working languages, and contact details. Their capacity with respect to emergencies and support to cluster implementation is also recorded.
2. *Technical Resources*: this Database lists training resources, publications, research studies, and other material developed locally or for the needs of the region. For all technical resources, including those available only in the local language, a brief summary in English and a contact person/organization is provided. Entries include information about resources from the NGO sector, as well as from the public and private sectors. Resources available for emergency response (e.g. important publications, kits, manuals) are also listed.
3. *Institutional Resources*: this Database includes information about NGOs, governmental and academic agencies, and institutions in the CEE/CIS region that are responsible for or work in the area of the early years and basic education (birth through primary school). In the area of ECD the scope stretches beyond the education sector: organizations and agencies working in healthcare, social protection and welfare are also included. The capacity of institutions to respond to emergencies is also documented.
4. *Policy and Legislation*: For every country, there is a special section with information on major policies and legislation connected with ECD.

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<sup>2</sup> Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Tajikistan and Ukraine.

In each of the countries where the mapping of resources was carried out, ISSA hired national consultants to work on data collection, using specially designed data collection sheets that were developed centrally. An advisory group consisting of representatives of key players and recognized experts in ECD, Education and related fields was set up in each country to nominate resources to be included in the directory. Those nominated were invited to fill in and submit the data collection sheets. All the forms received were edited for formatting consistency and included in the directory. Members of the advisory groups in each country were also consulted on the policy and legislations sections developed by national consultants.

As part of this partnership project ISSA has also produced five country profiles on early childhood development and education in emergencies in the CEE/CIS region (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, and Tajikistan). The profiles provide an overview of the emergency context in the five countries, especially with regard to the needs and rights of young children and their families. Making children an immediate priority in emergency planning and management in the CEE/CIS region is the main lesson from this exercise. The reports will soon be available at [ww.issa.nl/resources](http://ww.issa.nl/resources).

Plans to update and expand the Databases: These unique databases have the capacity of infinite expansion. ISSA encourages users to send in their suggestions for additional resources to be included. Upon request, forms will be made available to those interested in submitting new resources or updating existing entries for the Databases of ECDE Resources in CEE/CIS. Consultations will continue with the Program Committee and other stakeholders to agree on best ways to expand the databases and make them even more useful.

How this initiative supports the work of Members: ISSA members' resources and expertise are showcased and may be easily accessed by potential partners and donors. The expertise of the network is mapped, along with the policy framework in which members operate, which leads to better understanding of members' needs and strengths. Members can access other resources from the region, in case they search for potential partners or technical resources.

Partner/Funder: UNICEF

Consultants: ISSA Member NGOs, external experts

## **I.2 Book “Early Childhood Programs as the Doorway to Social Cohesion: Application of Vygotsky’s Ideas from an East-West Perspective”**

In late 2008, ISSA was delighted to receive both a book contract from Cambridge Scholars Publishing, as well as a grant from the Bernard van Leer Foundation to cover the costs to develop a book *Early Childhood Programs as the Doorway to Social Cohesion: Application of Vygotsky’s Ideas from an East-West Perspective*. The book consists of previously unpublished papers from the EECERA Conference *Exploring Vygotsky’s Ideas: Crossing Borders*, Prague, September 2007, hosted by ISSA. The main focus of the book is to illuminate how the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky has influenced early childhood education in both Western and Eastern contexts, and how his work has represented a seminal approach to the globalisation of ideas - long before that concept became part of the public discourse. In early 2009 a call for papers was sent to pre-selected presenters from the 2007 EECERA Conference. After receiving submissions of interest, a second round of selection took place. As the editing process took place during 2009, it was clear that some of the papers were not appropriate for the book, while others needed significant work, in order to maintain the balance of East/West authors, and to provide the broadest, most appropriate coverage of different topical areas. Several of the papers went through additional tiers of peer review in late 2009 and early 2010, to ensure the highest level of academic rigor. Despite additional time needed to finalize the project, it was crucial to make sure that the book represents papers both from the ISSA region and beyond. There is still limited number international publication where the network’s experience and ISSA region are represented and this book attempts to fill this gap.

As part of the agreement with the publisher, ISSA will receive royalties and also a 40% discount on purchasing copies. The publication, which will, no doubt, be a useful resource for members and their national partners is

expected to come out in March 2011. The book was edited by Aija Tuna, ISSA Program Specialist and former ISSA Program Director and Jacqueline Hayden, Professor of Early Childhood and Social Inclusion, Macquarie University, Australia, with significant work in editing by ISSA Consultant, Taryn Paladiy. More news on: [http://www.issa.nl/news\\_vygotsky.html](http://www.issa.nl/news_vygotsky.html).

Funder: Bernard van Leer Foundation; Partner: International Expert, Jacqueline Hayden, as co-editor  
Contributors/authors: experts from the ISSA network and external experts

### **I.3 International Conference on topical issues in ECD – Inclusive Education**

In the first half of 2010, ISSA worked closely with its partners in preparing for the International Conference, Riga 2010: ***Embracing Inclusive Approaches for Children and Youth with Special Education Needs***, which took place in Riga, Latvia, 12-14 July 2010. This conference, co-hosted by ISSA, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and its Division of International Special Education and Services (DISES), and the Center for Education Initiatives (CEI), Latvia also served as ISSA's Annual Conference in 2010. To explore the latest research, best practices, and innovations in making the world a better place for each child, regardless of their abilities and needs, **more than 520 participants**: educational practitioners, researchers, policy makers, and NGO activists from more than **60 countries** from Europe and around the world gathered in Riga. Approximately **56% of conference participants were from the ISSA region**. Altogether **215 presentations** took place during the conference – including 29 poster presentations. From the ISSA region there were more than **110 presenters**, including presenters from the ISSA network. In addition, 2 keynote speakers were from the region (Gunta Anca and Elena Kozhenikova), and 1 keynote speaker from the ISSA Board (Phyllis Magrab). Both the region and the ISSA network were well represented at the event.

The event was organized in partnership with and with generous support from the Open Society Institute, and also with the technical support and participation of UNICEF CEE/CIS.

This conference, organized under the patronage of the Latvian First Lady Lilita Zatlere, was intended for all those who believe that children and youth with special education needs deserve all possible support to develop their potential and become equal members of society; who agree that inclusive education is the best way to guarantee the rights of each child; who want to learn about interesting innovations and best practices for making the world a more inclusive place for every child, as well as to contribute their own experiences.

As more and more countries around the world strive towards the goals of the *Education for All* initiative, there is growing political will and pressure from the grassroots to demand for education systems to turn to increasingly inclusive approaches in order to meet the needs of children and youth who have traditionally been excluded from mainstream education or have been denied education.

The conference was an important event for Latvia and the whole CEE/CIS region. The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia, UNESCO Latvian National Commission, Riga City Council, Soros Foundation-Latvia, and many other organizations and municipalities were instrumental in preparing for and hosting the event, as well as enabling more than 110 researchers and practitioners from Latvia to take part in the conference, learn from the guests, and share experiences from the event's host country. Participants discussed how more extensive partnerships can be developed at all levels around the Baltic Sea and in the post-communist region, as well as how the East and West can work together more closely, benefiting and learning from each other's experiences.

The concept of the conference was based on research and practice findings that have shown abundant benefits, both academic and social, to all children and youth involved in inclusive education programs. However, simply placing children with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms without appropriate planning, commitment, and support does not guarantee positive outcomes. As emphasized by one of the speakers, Prof. Ulf Janson from Sweden, inclusive education should not be considered a strategy for how to work with children with

special educational needs. Inclusion reflects fundamental principles in society celebrating diversity, aims at promoting development and learning for everyone, and provides areas for social participation in learning and caring environments, peer relations, and interactions.

In this exciting and prestigious international event, participants shared and learned about evidenced-based practices with an emphasis on access, quality, and equity; creative, comprehensive inclusive education approaches; innovations in creating inclusive schools; and integrating research into practice to create stronger links with stakeholders. Participants worked together to explore opportunities to align inclusive special education implementation with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and UNESCO's Education for All.

Conference participants welcomed to the conference a diverse roster of distinguished keynote speakers whose inspirational speeches addressed the issue of inclusive approaches from different angles: Gunta Anca, Chair, Latvian Umbrella Body for Disability Organizations SUSTENTO, Riga, Latvia; Dr. Elena Kozhevnikova, Director, Early Intervention Institute, St. Petersburg, Russian Federation; Dr. Phyllis Magrab, Director, Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development, Washington, D.C., USA; Marope Mmantsetsa, Director of Division for the Promotion of Basic Education, UNESCO, France; Dr. Deborah Ziegler, Associate Executive Director, Policy & Advocacy Services, Council for Exceptional Children, USA.

In the opening keynote Dr. Phyllis Magrab, Director of the Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development, reminded participants that the desired results of an inclusive approach are a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and the development and learning of each child with special educational needs to reach their full potential. Twenty years of research have proved that there are several important aspects for gaining success: valuing differences, promoting a culture of equality of opportunity, partnering with families, individualizing learning opportunities and creating a wide range of teaching strategies to promote collaboration across the human service delivery system.

Gunta Anca, Chair of the Latvian Umbrella Body for Disability Organizations SUSTENTO, told her story of being a girl who was excluded from school on the 1st of September, a widespread and well-loved holiday celebrating the beginning of the new school year in the region, to becoming an advocate for the rights of people with disabilities. SUSTENTO unites 32 organizations, members of these organizations are people with different kinds of disabilities and chronic diseases who work together toward better policies for people with disabilities and chronic diseases, which prevent discrimination and safeguard human rights. Over the years, NGOs have become one of the key players in the governmental negotiation process, have a specialized knowledge, technical expertise, research capacities and local contacts, and therefore should take on a more important role in reinforcing changes in the education systems to ensure that high quality education is available and accessible to all pupils with disabilities.

A special **Early Years Strand** in the conference was hosted by ISSA. This strand emphasized the importance of early intervention and support for development, explored special needs as an outcome of complex interactions between health conditions and the physical and social environment, and offered practical solutions to deal with complex issues which may prevent young children from learning and from developing to their full potential.

ISSA's approach to inclusive education was reflected also by the presentation of Marope Mmantsetsa, Director of Division for the Promotion of Basic Education, UNESCO, who with great passion reminded participants that we have to start at the beginning, not at the end, and early childhood education and care is a critical entry point to inclusive human capital development. In September 2010 UNESCO hosted a World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) *Building the Wealth of Nations* in Moscow. Cornelia Cincilei represented ISSA at this event, which was another opportunity to raise important questions and to mobilize political will, research findings, and professional expertise to effect change on behalf of children and their families. A report on attending this conference is available in ISSA's Newsletter: <http://www.issa.nl/newsletter/10/winter/part2.html>

Describing differences between inclusive and traditional approaches, Dr. Elena Kozhevnikova, Director of the Early Intervention Institute, St. Petersburg, Russian Federation, stressed that we have to create possibilities for children

to be children, to play and be happy, making the environment and life more „normal” and suitable for them and their families, not trying to correct children to fit better in the existing systems.

Deborah A. Ziegler, Associate Executive Director for Policy and Advocacy Services at the Council for Exceptional Children, highlighted various provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and identified key aspects of successful advocacy campaigns. She emphasized the importance of well articulated policy that emanates from a body of research and the responsibility of State parties to provide appropriate fiscal resources consistently in order to provide for high quality education that is aligned to high standards.

In the closing session Mrs. Ingrida Circene, Member of the Latvian Parliament and a medical doctor by education and professional background addressed participants, emphasizing how important it is to join forces of different specialists to make sure that each child, especially children with social educational needs, receives more love, more understanding, and more support from society. The essence of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, according to Mrs. Circene, can be expressed in a very simple way: “life-long equal opportunities for everybody; life-long equal rights for everybody.” Our task is to make it happen.

In the week following the conference, Latvian First Lady Lilita Zatlere invited representatives of the organizers and participants of the conference for reflection on the event and what should be next steps in the direction of the inclusive education towards inclusive society in Latvia.

The program of the event, conference presentations and information about the organizers are available on: <http://www.cec.sped.org/Content/NavigationMenu/ProfessionalDevelopment/RIGA2010Conference/default.htm>.

#### **I.4 ISSA Network’s Participation in International Task Forces, Working Groups, Meetings and Other Initiatives focusing on Access to ECD Services**

1) ISSA is an active member of three working groups of UNA (formerly known as the Learning Initiative on Children and Ethnic Diversity - JLICED). As a result, several case studies will be included in UNA papers and later on the website, on projects implemented by ISSA’s members – an excellent opportunity for international recognition and visibility. Participation in UNA activities helps to represent CEE/CIS region in the global ECD community and make sure that both experience and expertise is offered. It also helps bring back into the ISSA network new ideas and information on trends, resources etc. Read more about this in the ISSA newsletter: <http://www.issa.nl/newsletter/09/autumnwinter/main.html>

2) ISSA is a member of Eurochild’s Early Years Thematic Working Group, contributing significantly to shaping the focus of the TWG and to making sure that the needs and experiences from the region are heard. As a result of ISSA’s cooperation with Eurochild, ISSA has benefited from the opportunity to send two representatives to a Study Tour in Poland organized by Children in Scotland and hosted by the Comenius Foundation. The ISSA network was also invited to send two representatives to the Eurochild Members’ Exchange Seminar in Estonia, which focused on community-based ECD. See under Goal III.4 more information and links to reports from ISSA representative who attended these meetings. ISSA was also invited to attend Eurochild’s annual conference in November, when another meeting of the Early Years TWG was organized. A report from the ISSA representative attended the conference is available on: <http://www.issa.nl/oc/index.php/network-news/149-report-on-participation-of-eva-izsak-issa-network-manager-at-the-eurochild-conference-sweden>. ISSA regularly receives Infoflashes from Eurochild with the most updated information on policy events and activities in Europe, including policies related to ECD. Relevant information is shared in the ISSA network.

3) ISSA was invited to submit a chapter to a book entitled *Critical Issues in Early Years’ Policies*, to be published by Sage. ISSA members were asked to express their interest to engage in this initiative. As a result, Dawn Tankersley, Gerda Sula, and Ulviya Mikailova worked together to submit an outline for a chapter. The main focus of the chapter entitled “*Early Years Services as a Vehicle for Democratisation: ISSA’s Experience in Supporting*

*Practitioners' Professional Development, Building Partnerships and Influencing Systems*" is to showcase how implementation of the Step by Step program in the region has led to systemic approach to improving quality in ECD; development, use and revision of the ISSA Principles for Quality Pedagogy was also described in the chapter.

4) ISSA was invited by the Bernard van Leer Foundation to send a team of experts to attend an ECD Workshop on Roma Inclusion, held in March 2010 in The Hague. This event was organized under the umbrella of the European Foundation Center's Forum for Roma Inclusion, of which BvLF is a member. The workshop produced recommendations and key messages which later members of the Forum conveyed on behalf of European Foundations at the Cordoba Summit. The ISSA Delegation, made up of representatives of members from Croatia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, was very active in the workshop, helping to shape the key messages related to Roma inclusion in ECD.

5) ISSA's Executive Director and Program Director were invited to attend an international expert meeting hosted by the Bernard van Leer Foundation in November 2010 in The Hague, focused on testing BvLF's strategies for bringing quality early learning investments to scale. The meeting brought in attention ISSA's expertise in working with marginalized children and replicating/scaling-up strategies.

6) In 2010, UNICEF invited representatives of the ISSA network to attend a number of meetings focusing on Roma inclusion and inclusion of children with special education needs. Meetings were held in Budapest, Bucharest and Geneva. In addition to representatives from the Secretariat, ISSA members from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Ukraine also attended these meetings, which focused on building closer partnerships among key stakeholders and fine-tuning UNICEF's strategy on inclusive education. ISSA was also invited by UNICEF to comment on papers, reports and position statements. The recent UNICEF publication *Towards Roma Inclusion: A Review of Roma Education Initiatives in Central and South-Eastern Europe*, which aims at defining programs which have been successful and are worth replicating or scaling up, showcases also the work of ISSA's members in Serbia, Slovakia and Macedonia. The initiatives described in the paper vary widely, but have proven successful where they have been implemented, and have also proven to be replicable. The paper discusses what additional work could be beneficial in continuing to assess the efficacy of Roma Programs, as well as the policies and practices required of national and local governments in order to create the most ideal conditions for successful Roma education programs.

## **I.5 Education for Social Justice – Supporting Social Inclusion**

In 2010 ISSA was a partner with Center for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP) in Serbia, who received an Innovative Grant from OSI 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. Both of these activities were carried out in the first half of 2010. A meeting had been planned in Chisinau, Moldova in April with other member NGOs who had been involved in ESJ projects in their countries as well as external experts to discuss the findings and to explore options for future engagement in this area. Unfortunately this meeting did not happen as planned due to travel restrictions caused by the volcano ash cloud. However, those who were attending the Meeting of the Quality Core Group of Experts and the Western CIS Regional Meeting were able to give input and direction for expanding ISSA's efforts in this area in the future including: looking at funding sources for a resource pack on Whole School Approach to Social Inclusion, developing a position statement on social inclusion, developing advocacy materials and making closer connections with higher education. As main implementer of the project, CIP submitted reports to OSI on the completion of the project.

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

## **I.6 Partnership projects which directly work towards improving the lives of children and their chances for success in life**

During the first half of 2010, negotiations were finalized with donors and partners, and foundations were laid for a project whose implementation began in the second half of the year at the country level, in partnership with member NGOs and other stakeholders: *Roma Pilot Project A Good Start* (AGS) in partnership with Roma Education Fund and other partners - Hungary, Romania, Macedonia, Slovakia (2010-2012). ISSA's main contribution, consisting in delivering by ISSA NGO tailored trainings in the four countries, was much appreciated by local partners. The trainings focused on strengthening the ECEC component of the project by providing knowledge and skills to teachers, parents, community mediators, community representatives and professionals on how to better provide Roma young children and families with quality ECEC services, according to specific needs of the Roma communities. One of the resources to be developed by ISSA under the umbrella of the project, was completed in 2010: *Continuum for Assessing Caregivers in Community/Home-based Programs*. The publications was made available to AGS project partners, and to the whole ISSA network in the online library on the ISSA Online Community: <http://www.issa.nl/oc/index.php/library?task=view&id=35&catid=64>

An Executive Summary of ISSA's participation in this project is available on ISSA Online Community, along with other annexes to the Interim Report 2010: <http://issa.nl/oc/index.php/component/content/article/102-organizational-archive/134-annexes-to-narrative-report-jan-june-2010>.

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

#### **Overview of Progress under Goal II**

ISSA developed a Resource Pack to promote ISSA's Definition of Quality Pedagogy based on revised Principles. Shared understanding was built in the network around the revised Principles through peer exchanges and technical assistance, revitalizing ISSA as a learning community around issues of quality pedagogy, increased access and community participation. As a result members are better equipped to make an impact both at practice level and also at policy level.

### **II. 1 Study on the Implementation of the ISSA Pedagogical Standards (2001 – 2008) and their impact on early childhood development and education (ECDE) policies and practices in the region of ISSA's network and beyond**

In order to inform further development of the strategy for ISSA's work in promoting and improving high quality in ECD, with support from OSI, ISSA worked on a study on how the ISSA Pedagogical Standards were used in the network. The purpose of this project was to compile a comprehensive overview of how the Standards have been used by different NGOs implementing the Step by Step program across the ISSA network of 28 member organizations since the Standards were introduced in 2001. It was agreed that such study will provide information and insight on what has been learned over the past 8 years and could help inform the work going forward and ensure maximum impact. This study examines the role of the standards as a document, as they were implemented through certification, mentoring, training for staff development, and as part of the broader Quality Early Education Initiative (QEEl) implemented in ISSA countries in different ways, according to the local needs and capacity.

The objectives of the study were:

- To document and analyze approaches and effectiveness of using the ISSA standards in their original form.

- To identify barriers and enabling factors that help teachers improve practice.
- To explore the impact of standards on policy development and implementation.
- To inform the development of ISSA's strategy for using the revised standards.
- To reflect on the impact and recognition of the standards in the wider international arena.

An analysis and documentation of how the ISSA Pedagogical Standards were used has been developed by collecting both quantitative and qualitative data from each NGO and synthesizing findings into a report that describes the impact of the standards on ECDE practice and policy across the ISSA network. The Study had several stages including analyses of the available documents, collecting information from members, developing country profiles, receiving feedback on them by the NGOs in order to assure maximum accuracy, extensive consultation with international experts on ECD and certification/assessment issues etc.

The full report is accompanied by three case studies which may be used as annexes to the Study, as well as stand alone publications, documenting the work of ISSA members using the ISSA Standards. The case studies explore more deeply three main levels where implementation and changes took place:

- individual teacher practice
- school and community culture
- national policy.

Preliminary reports and findings were presented to ISSA members on several occasions during ISSA meetings in 2009 and 2010, at Council Meetings, regional meetings and other events. Results were also presented at several international conferences. An Executive Summary was disseminated at the Riga events in July 2010. The summary was translated and published in English and in Russian, in order to make it accessible to a larger number of stakeholders. Both versions of the summary are available on the ISSA website. The English version of the full report was edited and sent for layout and Russian translation. The summary, as well as the full report and the case studies are available to ISSA members in the online library on the ISSA Online Community, along with other supporting materials for the ISSA Principles: <http://www.issa.nl/oc/index.php/library?task=showCategory&catid=63>. The Executive Summary in English and Russian is also available to the wider public on the ISSA website, along with the ISSA Principles: <http://www.issa.nl/resources.html>.

The team working on this project included Mimi Howard, as lead researcher, and several co-researchers from the region: Tatjana Vonta, Cornelia Cincilei, Tahmina Rajabova and Aija Tuna. Dawn Tankersley and Liana Ghent, as well as Sarah Klaus and Kate Lapham of OSI also provided input, especially in the initial phases of designing the study and setting objectives.

Findings from the Study have been already very useful for planning and discussions with ISSA members during the regional meetings on Quality and other events. Regional Anchors have also used them for discussions in their respective regions. Lessons learned are very rich and complex and cover not only professional pedagogical issues but also systemic approaches to changes in the system and the role of NGOs in this. Therefore results of the Study also inform discussions on organizational issues and positioning of ISSA and its member NGOs.

In terms of impact, the ISSA Pedagogical Standards were found to effectively influence:

- Individual teachers and their daily classroom practices
- Existing education systems designed to prepare, improve and monitor teachers
- Development/institutionalization of new national education priorities, policies, practices.

Among lessons learned, the Study identified:

- Need to connect teacher training with ongoing monitoring and maintaining quality of performance
- Need to create innovative strategies to support teachers in everyday practice
- Need to include reliability/observation in mentor training
- Importance of establishing partnerships with family and community
- Need to monitor and conduct research to assess and demonstrate outcomes
- Need to engage school administration and educational authorities in the process

One of the most important conclusions of the study is that it was not the ISSA Pedagogical Standards as a finished product but rather the basic guiding principles behind the standards that had been influential in bringing about change in teacher practice, higher education and national policy level. This is what has to be taken into account when planning use of the revised ISSA Principles: *Competent Educators of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: ISSA's Definition of Quality Pedagogy*.

Partner/Funder: OSI. Consultants: ISSA Member NGOs, external expert

## II.2 ISSA's Definition of Quality Pedagogy - Revision of the ISSA Pedagogical Standards and Development of a Resource Pack on Quality Pedagogy

As part of the benefits offered to members, and in order to support ISSA's work towards achieving its strategic goals, the following *Resource Pack on ISSA's Definition of Quality Pedagogy* was developed in 2010:

- ***Competent Educators of the 21st Century: ISSA's Principles of Quality Pedagogy***

English and Russian versions available in hard copy and electronically from the ISSA website <http://www.issa.nl/resources.html>. Spanish version will also be available electronically from the ISSA website

- ***Putting Knowledge into Practice– A Guidebook for Teachers***

English and Russian versions available in electronic version in the library on the ISSA Online Community

- ***Continuum of Examples for Improving Quality Practice in ECD*** – (center-based ECD).

This publication was renamed as ***Professional Development Tool for Improving Quality Practice in ECD***. English version finalized and sent for layout and Russian translation; both are available in the online library.

- ***Poster*** outlining principles of quality pedagogy

Template in English available on ISSA Online Community for members to translate and use in their countries

- ***Video Library on Good Practices in ECD***

A collection of video clips from different ISSA countries, with methodological support for self-study or trainings/mentoring are available to members on ISSA's online library, which is continuously being expanded. Video clips are available in multiple languages, with English subtitles and soon also with Russian sub-titles.

- ***On-line Course for Professional Development***

The development of this modular course, based on ISSA's Principles, began in 2010 and will be finalized in 2011. The course will be piloted in English and Slovak. During 2010 an online tool was identified for online education and cooperation, the framework of the course was developed, as well as drafts of all modules. Once piloted, the course will be available to members to translate for use in their countries.

- ***Continuum for Assessing Caregivers in Community/Home-based Programs***

This tool was developed under the umbrella of the A Good Start Project. See above under Goal I.6.

- ***Instruments to support the work of member organizations which use the ISSA Principles for Certification***

Work on this began in 2010 and will continue in 2011 taking into account plans for certification.

- ***Shorter Instrument based on ISSA Principles to be used for Program Evaluation***

The process started in second half of 2010 and will continue in the first quarter of 2011.

- ***Glossary of Terms to accompany materials related to the ISSA Principles***

English and Russian version are finalized and attached to *Putting Knowledge into Practice– A Guidebook for Teachers*

ISSA's Resource Pack aims to support members' work in promoting high quality and professionalism in providing care and education for young children. These resources were developed by a number of experts from the network under the leadership provided by the Secretariat. ISSA is pleased to report that the voluminous and content-rich methodology *Putting Knowledge into Practice – A Guidebook for Teachers*, the *Professional Development Tool for Improving Quality Practice in ECD* and all the other resources are now ready to be used by members in order to support practitioners, school administration, local and national educational authorities and other stakeholders in improving quality of ECD services.

The Guidebook focuses on:

- Why each principle is important, including the philosophy, background, research findings that support it
- Examples of what constitutes good pedagogy under each of the principles, and indicators of quality
- How educators can move forward to become agents of change in their schools, their communities, and their profession
- The importance of quality experiences for children's development and learning in the early years.

With suggestions on each of the 7 principles and each of the 85 indicators, the Professional Development Tool, which can be used both 1) as tool for teachers' self evaluation, self-improvement, mentoring and training, as well as for 2) assessment and monitoring purposes by different stakeholders, describes:

- how teachers can make a good start in improving their performance
- what is evidence for further engaging in quality practice
- how to move forward to sustainable and systemic change in the teaching paradigm and practice.

In 2010 the ISSA Principles were translated and published as full publications and/or posters by several member NGOs, using the templates and electronic versions provided by the Secretariat. For example, members in Croatia and Moldova have placed the posters in their SbS sites, where parents and all other stakeholders can see them. Several NGOs contacted ISSA with requests for support in using revised ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy in their work. Discussions during regional meetings also focused on this topic. Work will continue in 2011 with technical assistance from the Secretariat and the quality experts who worked on the resources.

During the first half of the year ISSA made progress in developing the online course to introduce quality pedagogy to interested kindergarten teachers (being funded under a service contract with IBM). Joomla was identified as the online vehicle for the course and drafts of the first 6 of 12 modules were completed. Staff from several member NGOs have been contracted to give input into the course. Additional videos were produced to use in the course that will also be included in the video library for members, with examples of quality pedagogy. The course is expected to be piloted with teachers in English and Slovak with IBM funding, however it will be made available to all ISSA NGOs, as a resource that they can use both online and for trainings (materials will be burned on CDs). In second half of the year, drafts of all modules were developed. Dawn Tankersley coordinated the writing of the modules, to which also contributed experts from Croatia and Serbia also contributed. The Joomla-based platform for the online course was developed and populated with videos. At present the subtitles of the videos are in English, and Russian and Slovak subtitles will follow soon.

Partners: OSI, REF; Funders: OSI, IBM, EU

Consultants: ISSA Member NGOs

### **II.3 ISSA Meetings to support implementation of Goal II**

In February, ISSA organized in Budapest a Meeting of Experts in Working with Video Clips - members from several NGOs (Slovakia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia) that had been involved in working with video clips that illustrate different indicators of quality practice. The result of this meeting was the beginning of a library of video clips to support work with the ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy.

In early April, a Meeting of the Core Group of Quality Experts took place in Chisinau, Moldova. The purpose of this meeting was to field-test the supporting materials to the ISSA Principles, the Guidebook for Teachers and the Professional Development Tool, which had just been completed. Participants also worked on fine-tuning the initial Russian translation with an expanded Core Group of Quality Experts. In addition the agendas for the upcoming regional meetings of national quality experts were developed.

One of the outcomes of this meeting was a decision to develop separate continuums (renamed as Professional Development Tool) for teachers/caretakers of different age groups: 0-3; preschool/primary school. The 0-3 continuum will be developed in 2011. The examples in the continuums are presented only as suggestions, not as a checklist for practitioners and they show sensitivity towards national situations, culture and professionals in order to use these documents as encouragement for professional growth and improvement.

Other outcomes of this meeting included:

- plans for how to mentor member NGOs to improve the quality of practice in their local networks, as well as how to improve efforts to advocate for quality ECD services;
- a decision on how certification will be approached in 2011, for those NGOs which currently have authorization to certify. The national coordinator for quality will meet with the ISSA Reliability Coordinator to re-establish reliability with the new Principles.

### **Regional Meetings of National Quality Experts**

The Meeting of the Core Group of Quality Experts was followed in late April by the first scheduled Regional Meeting, which brought together members from the Western CIS (WCIS) region and the Baltic States. Unfortunately, due to the disruption in air travel caused by the volcano in Iceland, not all participants were able to travel to the regional meeting. However, the meeting still took place with those who arrived earlier or traveled by train. Despite this unforeseen change in plans, the meeting turned out to be very successful and was highly appreciated by its participants especially in terms of being able to work together on the Russian translation of the Principles and supporting materials.

It was initially planned that there would be separate meeting for Russian speaking quality experts in the first quarter of 2010. However in order to save time and resources it was decided to have this meeting together with the regional meeting in Chisinau and to carry out online communication before and after it took place. During the meeting, significant progress was made in improving the Russian version of the ISSA Principles and other materials. In-depth discussion took place with quality experts from Moldova, Russia, Ukraine and Lithuania led by ISSA Program Specialist Aija Tuna from Latvia, along with the active and very helpful involvement of Sergei Pshenitsyn, as long-term ISSA translator and interpreter and as a person deeply involved and knowledgeable about the SbS program. Next steps were identified in order to continue to improve Russian version of materials in the ISSA Resource Pack on Quality Pedagogy, including the Russian version of the Glossary. As it was expressed by participants, it was very useful to have this unexpected time in Chisinau, to focus on language issues for translation, which led to deeper understanding of new concepts and approaches in the Russian speaking region. This meeting can be considered as a good kick-off for ISSA's Russian speaking Special Interest Group on quality pedagogy, whose work will continue in 2011.

In late May, the Regional Meeting for the Central Asia/Mongolia/Azerbaijan sub-region took place in Baku. Representatives from ISSA's member in Belarus (who had been scheduled to attend the Western CIS meeting) also joined this meeting.

In early June, the third Regional Meeting took place for the NGOs from the Balkans and EU countries, with representatives from Georgia and Armenia from WCIS also joining. An unexpected benefit that occurred from the first meeting's problem with attendance due to travel disruption was that the remaining two meetings ended up being more cross-regional, which allowed the NGOs to see the diversity in the network as well as the strong

commitment on everyone's part to promoting quality practice in their own countries. This also prevented the regional meetings from reinforcing rigid borders among the ISSA sub-region, and allowed for more cross-fertilization. Members expressed an interest to continue to have thematic meetings, or regional meetings with cross-regional representation, and not with a strict division by sub-region.

The three regional meetings, which were the highlight of the first half of the year, shared the same objectives, which participants reported were successfully met:

- Develop common understanding among ISSA national quality experts on the approach to ECD and principles of quality pedagogy included in the revised ISSA Definition of Quality *Competent Educators of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Principles of Quality Pedagogy*
- Discuss lessons learned and plan further activities in promoting and improving quality, based on results of *Study on the Implementation of the ISSA Pedagogical Standards*
- Discuss supporting materials for promoting quality and professional development: *Putting Knowledge into Practice: Handbook for Teachers, Continuum of Examples, Video Library*
- Apply new materials for observation of practice; establish reliability during preschool site visits and during review/discussion of video clips on classroom practices/quality issues.
- Initiate the development of national and regional strategies to introduce revised ISSA definition of quality in different countries, including defining what support is needed from ISSA Secretariat and what can be more active horizontal cooperation among members.
- Propose mechanisms for professional exchange and peer-learning/mentoring – e. g.: Special Interest Groups (SIGs) on specific topics (using different languages in the network), developing new materials, using video clips to support the process.
- Identify topics for SIGs on Quality and discuss what participation in them will entail (how members will contribute and benefit)
- Share and discuss membership and organizational issues: challenges and opportunities that are common for member NGOs, support needed from the ISSA Secretariat and in general how the association can better meet members' needs; further discuss the draft of the Members' Charter.

There were several significant outcomes of these meetings:

- Members field-tested and discussed ISSA's new resources, developed to support application of revised *Principles of Quality Pedagogy: Putting Knowledge into Practice: Guidebook and Professional Development Tool for Improving Quality Practice in ECD*.
- Shared understanding was reached on concepts and functions of Principles and supporting materials
- Introduction of the video library and how it can be used and expanded by members.
- Identification of areas that members would like to be more engaged in, including the development of new partnership projects/SIGs around mentoring, research issues and how to promote a research agenda, leadership in promoting educational reform, and learning how to use videos more effectively to promote quality practice
- Understanding on how certification of teachers will be approached in the network in the future
- Meaningful discussion on strengthening ISSA as a learning community through horizontal sharing and cooperation in the network with some suggestions for next steps

Challenges identified in these meetings, and on which members will continue to focus for solving, include:

- Members will need funding to translate the supporting materials for the Principles
- Need to have greater understanding among member NGOs of the nuances of the language being used in the documents, as well as understanding of what some of the concepts look like in order to have meaningful translation of the documents
- Need to develop new modules in some cases to accompany the documents
- New modules/resources needed on how to work with videos for training and mentoring
- Each NGOs will need to develop a strategy to launch the Principles; define clearly at what level they work.
- NGOs need to articulate how they position themselves as NGOs and the ISSA Principles in their country – this will influence how ISSA positions itself at the regional level
- The Members' Charter needs further discussion both in terms of its functions and in terms of content.

Many of these issues were followed up during the October Council Meeting and Professional Development Meeting, when, among other things, Special Interest Groups met to work on developing proposals for partnership project, to work on jointly developing new resources or to carry forward work under current projects.

Partner/Funder: OSI - through funding rolled over from the 2009 General Support Grant, and through funding in the 2010 General Support Grant installment for first quarter. The regional meetings were funded through the 2010 General Support Grant installment for second quarter.

## **II.4 Technical Assistance Offered to Members and Member Exchanges in the Network**

Services offered to members by ISSA Secretariat include technical assistance on project development and implementation, promoting quality ECD services, implementing professional development initiatives. During the first half of the year, in consultation with OSI, the Secretariat began planning technical assistance to be offered in the second half of 2010 to members in Tajikistan and Mongolia.

During 2010 the ISSA Secretariat provided support to those NGOs which already translated and published the revised ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy and/or posters. Technical assistance was also offered during the ongoing partnership projects, for instance the 2010 International Conference organized in partnership with ISSA's member in Latvia and the TACIS-funded project from Kazakhstan.

In second half of the year, following the input from the Regional Anchor for Central Asia, Mongolia and Azerbaijan for strengthening the capacity building and advocacy for Quality Pedagogy in Mongolia and Tajikistan, two technical assistance activities were organized by the ISSA Secretariat and conducted by ISSA's Quality Experts in the last two months of 2010.

**Technical assistance in Mongolia** was provided by Sanja Handzar and took place between 22-25 November 2010.

Main content areas addressed and main objectives:

- Discussion on Quality in ECE
- Presentation of ISSA Pedagogical Principles
- Discussion on possibilities to enhance professional development of teachers by using ISSA resources on Quality

**Roundtable organized in Mongolia** – general conclusions:

- The roundtable was hosted by the Ministry of Education, with participation of many key stakeholders; discussion was focused on issues such as teachers' education and standards for children outcomes in preschool and elementary schools in different ISSA countries, as well as how newly developed ISSA resources could contribute to processes that Mongolian Education Alliance already started.
- A number of participants expressed admiration and gratitude to Mongolian Education Alliance for bringing valuable practice, experience and resources to the Mongolian Educational System.
- For a higher impact on public policy development and implementation, it would be essential to provide Mongolian translation for materials developed by ISSA on Quality. The only material available in Mongolian language are so far: *Competent Educators of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: ISSA's Definition of Quality Pedagogy*, posters and PowerPoint presentations and relevant handouts.
- During the presentations and discussions, it was obvious that ISSA and the Mongolian Education Alliance had high reputation in the country and that MEA is very successful in building strong and productive partnership with the Ministry of Education.

**Follow up activities envisaged**: This was the first in a row of similar events that MEA is planning to conduct in order to promote ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy, based on newly developed resources. The next round of activities is envisaged for engaging with the Inspection Office. The Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science is seeking possibilities to collaborate on revising the teacher evaluation/inspection system.

Workshop for teacher trainers and mentors organized in Mongolia – general conclusions:

- Mongolian Master Teacher Trainers and other Preschool and Elementary school representatives (teachers, principals) had extremely high motivation and dedication toward implementing ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy.
- This was the first complete initiative to introduce the ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy to the trainers and mentors and therefore this workshop was of a great importance to further improve the capacity of the core group as well the trainer/mentor team. As the majority of the participants were familiar with the previous version of the principles, the event helped to deepen their understanding of quality.
- Participants were eager to get involved in workshop activities, were writing down extensive notes in their notebooks and many times during the workshop they reflected back on their notes.
- Working with the Professional Development Tool on Quality Practices, as well as with the Videos Clips, and providing different types of activities on using the newly developed resources was the main focus during the workshop and was highly appreciated
- A DVD containing all presentations, video clips and additional materials related to ISSA Resources on Quality was provided to all participants and was much valued.

Follow-up activities envisaged: The next ISSA engagement through the experts should be channeled to local mentors. In other words, it would be very effective if the training for mentors (previously trained as well as those who MEA envisages to be mentors) is organized again in line with the new principles. It would be effective working with the same group in order to finalize ideas and plans on how to use resources (once they are translated). It would be also valuable if the group had opportunity to learn more on how to use video clips for professional development of teachers and get familiar with the Professional Learning Communities concept.

Technical assistance in Tajikistan was provided by Zorica Trikić and took place between 9-12 December 2010.

Main content areas addressed and main objectives:

- Round Table on advocating for quality in ECE services by promoting ISSA Quality Principles
- Introduction of revised ISSA Principles and additional materials (Professional Development Tool, videos etc.) to stakeholders and teacher trainers/mentors
- To introduce ways how new ISSA materials (especially videos and continuum can be used during mentoring and professional process
- To demonstrate importance of building shared meaning and understanding of concept of quality (interviews with teachers after observation, small and whole group discussions)

Round table organized in Tajikistan (30 participants) – general conclusions:

- This was an introductory meeting because most of the participants were new in their positions: Heads of Educational Departments, TTI directors, representatives from higher education, Pedagogical Colleges, expert committee members who are representatives from different ministries (Ministry of Education, Academy of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Protection and Labor, NGO representatives etc.) and also school directors.
- Participants became acquainted with the Principles and all related materials. They expressed their opinion concerning these materials - how they can use them and how they will collaborate with SbS Tajikistan on teacher training and on preparation of future preschool and primary school teachers. The directors of TTI expressed their will to start collaboration on teacher training issues. They suggested to do joint trainings and at the end of each training the participants (preschool or school teachers) would receive certificates which will be recognized at the level of Ministry. It will help teachers to get credits or other benefits. They also said that not only Step by Step teachers will have opportunity to use these materials but they will try to involve more teachers from other school and preschools and even from other regions to the trainings and will share with these materials with them.

Follow up activities envisaged: After the roundtable ISSA's member in the country received official letters from TTIs directors concerning collaboration. They developed a working plan for 2011 with trainings on quality for preschool and primary school teachers, involving also their main trainers to conduct these trainings.

Workshop for teacher trainers and mentors (50 participants)– general conclusions:

- Video library is going to be very powerful tool when it comes to promotion of quality education and ISSA materials; they can also compensate lack of site visits (although in limited extent, but successfully); they are enriching trainings and very stimulating for participants – they really enjoyed to see practice and their colleagues from different countries, to compare, analyze, find inspiration for change and/or confirmation of their pedagogical practice
- Procedures for observation, rating and discussion between observers in small groups, are very inspiring and contribute to development of professional competences as well as feeling of belonging to a learning community among participants
- All materials and procedures developed so far by ISSA's Quality Group are providing opportunities for organizing different types of trainings (in terms of duration and content) to wide range of professionals
- Materials are useful as advocacy tool

Follow-up activities envisaged: To have in depth trainings combined with site visits and discussions with teachers; to have interviews with them and to develop Quality Improvement Plan together with teachers (to have more practical works in places). Mentors should be exposed to a longer training on how to use ISSA Principles as a mentoring and professional development tool.

## **Member Exchanges in the Network**

### **1. Study Visit to Croatia**

In the end of November/beginning of December 2010, following a decision taken by the Program Committee during the October Council Meeting, a Study Visit was organized for representatives of **ISSA NGO members from Central Asia, Azerbaijan and Mongolia**. Two experts from each country participated – 12 participants in total. **Open Academy Step by Step/Croatia** was chosen by the Program Committee as the host of the Study Visit and they highly contributed not only to the logistics of the event but also to conducting all programmatic activities. ISSA's Program Director and two additional Quality Experts joined their efforts in order to enrich the content of the activities, by conducting some of the sessions and contributing with their expertise: Sanja Hadzar from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Zorica Trikić from Serbia.

Goals of the study visit:

- Develop common understanding and capacity building among ISSA national quality experts on the approach to ECD and principles of quality pedagogy included in the revised *Competent Teachers of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: ISSA's Definition of Quality Pedagogy*
- Discuss relevance/strengths/limits of the supporting materials for promoting quality and professional development of practitioners: *Putting Knowledge into Practice: Handbook for Teachers, Continuum of Examples, Video Library*
- Apply new materials during practice observation and reflection and explore ideas for involvement using ISSA's Definition of Quality Pedagogy in each country

General conclusions of the study visit:

- The study visit combined presentations, discussions on quality resources and exercises with site visits to kindergartens and primary schools which was highly appreciated by the participants. The main goal of all activities was to establish a shared understanding of the definition of quality and of the way it is illustrated in the resource documents through discussions and applications which called also for contextualizing the opportunities for using these resources in the countries from where participants were coming.

- The resources were appreciated for covering both theoretical and practical aspects and as very helpful in providing NGOs with very useful tools for supporting teachers to apply the principles through training and mentoring.
- There is a strong need for translation of all resources in Russian and in many cases also in the local language so that they will be easier exploited in trainings and also as advocacy tools. The fact that most resources are already available in Russian was highly appreciated.
- The exchange of experience between the hosting country and participating countries was inspiring in terms of seeing how advocacy tools are used and how local partnerships can play an important supporting role, how ECE services are organized and activities delivered, and how the partnership between teachers and parents works.
- There are common problems that participating countries face, including lack of understanding of importance of ECD by stakeholders, lack of financial resources, lack of expertise on quality issues, lack of ECD experts.

Follow-up activities envisaged by participants in their own countries:

- Most of the participants expressed their intention to strengthen the advocacy initiatives addressing Ministries of Education and education authorities by organizing round tables, thematic meetings either on the local, regional or national level using the ISSA Quality Resources developed.
- Improvement of their current trainings and mentoring activities using the resources when available in Russian for providing teachers with more tools for applying the ISSA Quality Principles .

## 2. Other Member Exchanges

Following a call launched by the Secretariat in the Spring of 2010, two ISSA NGOs expressed interest in participation of colleagues from the network to specific events in their country. During the month of December two member exchange activities were organized with ISSA's assistance, supporting peer learning in the network.

**Step by Step Foundation, Czech Republic** organized a workshop with a new group of mentors on mentoring using the ISSA Quality Principles (more specifically focusing on Area 3 inviting as an expert and facilitator Peter Repicky from **Wide Open Foundation, Slovakia**. The course focused on acquiring basic skills in mentoring using the revised ISSA Principles. Special requirement for teacher training was mainly observation and mentoring support (interview) in Area 3 Diversity and inclusion. Main topics approached: learning about the process of mentoring, using ISSA Principles to provide feedback to the teachers, practicing observation by using video clips, and especially formulation of feedback on the Principle Area 3.

Follow-up activities envisaged: Organizing a follow-up more in depth course on mentoring skills, collaboration between teacher-mentor (interviewing techniques, mentor interview simulation, guiding observation in the classroom or on video, analysis of videos using principles, or other tools for summative evaluation of the teacher (in the framework of longer term cooperation teacher-mentor).

Between December 21-24, a national conference called *Community Schools in Ukraine: Dialogue of Partnership* took place, where **Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation** participated and invited a representative from **Pas cu Pas Moldova**. The main goal of the conference was to disseminate best practices of the Community School Program implemented in Ukraine and Moldova with a special focus on quality development and quality improvement. The two-day program of the conference included main reports and presentations prepared by community school coordinators and national coordinators from Ukraine and Moldova.

Follow-up activities envisaged: Placing conference outputs (conference materials, presentations, photos, etc.) on the websites of USSF [www.ussf.kiev.ua](http://www.ussf.kiev.ua), Step by Step Moldova [www.pascupas.md](http://www.pascupas.md) and on the website of the international project "Quality Development of Community Schools: Measuring the Impact of International Standards" [www.communityschoolstandards.org](http://www.communityschoolstandards.org). These materials will be analyzed and downloaded at mentioned websites by late February 2011.

Partner/Funder: OSI through different installments of 2010 General Support Grant  
Consultants: Members of the Core Group of Quality Experts, representatives of ISSA member NGOs

## **II.5 ISSA Network's participation in international initiatives related to Goal II**

### *Beyond Child Indicators: A Framework to Assess and Evaluate the Quality of Early Childhood Services and Programs in a Global Context*

ISSA is pleased to be a part of an international group developing a conceptual framework and set of guidelines for the measurement and assessment of Early Childhood program quality in global contexts. Given the lack of existing information to build such a framework and the implications for use with a global audience, the conference brought together a consortium of key stakeholders, including representatives from international development agencies, regional networks, national-level practitioners, researchers, and academics, to develop an Early Childhood program quality measurement framework. The conference took place in Abu Dhabi and was organized by New York University - Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, Yale University, Harvard University Graduate School of Education, and Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

The ISSA Secretariat worked closely with ISSA's Core Group of Quality Experts to develop presentations on the network's experiences in developing and implementing early childhood education standards in the CEE/CIS region, as well as a specific, detailed report on the experience of Lithuania in developing a framework, structure, conditions, and initiatives to promote and improve the quality of early childhood education and care. ISSA was represented at the meeting by Regina Sabaliauskiene, Executive Director of the Center for Innovative Education (ISSA Member in Lithuania).

This conference set the stage for three future phases of work, including (1) the creation of a set of guidelines to inform measurement practices, (2) a tested compendium of measurement tools individual countries might select from to meet their accountability and program improvement goals, and (3) actual implementation of the guidelines and compendium in a small set of low-income countries. Since the conference, participants have continued to communicate, working together to develop the above mentioned guidelines.

A report on the participation of ISSA's representative in this initiative was shared in the Summer issue of the ISSA Newsletter. <http://www.issa.nl/newsletter/10/summer/part1.html>

### *Study on the Competence Requirements of Staff in Early Childhood Education and Care*

In 2010 ISSA has entered into a collaboration with DECET (Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Training) and Children in Europe in a research project being led by the University of East London and The University of Ghent for the European Commission DG Education and Culture on *Competence Requirements for Staff in Early Childhood Education in the EU* (CORE). This EU-funded research project focuses on the interrelations between caregiver/teacher competences and the provision of high quality early childhood services that are understood to ensure better outcomes for children.

Several of ISSA's members in EU countries have been contacted to provide a general summary of the competences that countries require their ECEC staff to possess, based on definitions in relevant national legislation and policy documents. Members from Lithuania and Romania, in particular, provided extensive information. ISSA Program Specialist Dawn Tankersley serves on the project's Advisory Board.

The research project includes seven case studies of ECEC policy and provision in a geographically balanced sample. The case studies will look at high quality programs and analyze staff competences that contribute to the quality of provision in France, UK, Denmark, Italy, Belgium, Slovenia, and Croatia. Two of ISSA's member NGOs, the

Developmental Research Center for Educational Initiatives in Slovenia and Open Academy Step by Step in Croatia, are involved in the case studies.

The final goal of the project is to develop recommendations for actions that should be taken at national and European levels and to draw recommendations for policy and practice in order to:

- promote professionalism in early childhood across all layers of the professional system, including practice, management, qualification and training, and research
- improve pre- and in-service qualification and training of the workforce
- develop an understanding of qualification requirements for the ECEC workforce that shares common values and respects the diversity of possible approaches to realizing them across Europe.

More information may be found in a report on ISSA's participation in this project published in the ISSA Newsletter: <http://www.issa.nl/newsletter/10/summer/part2.html>.

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

#### **Overview of Progress under Goal III**

**Building capacity in the ISSA network to work under this goal continues to remain a priority. It is obvious that there is expertise in the network, which can be built upon more strategically. Progress in 2010 includes articulating more clearly ISSA's understanding of concepts and launching a process of mapping different types of community-based/ nonformal programs that are available, with different indicators of quality identified to help understand how quality can be determined. Useful partnerships have been strengthened in order to enable the ISSA network to learn from approaches and resources of other stakeholders in the region and beyond.**

#### **III.1 Smooth Transitions Project**

ISSA began implementing the project *Smooth Transitions* in January 2010. The first meeting of the project was organized in Istanbul between 14-17 February. ISSA was successful in recruiting top level researchers and consultants to be involved in this project including Pia Britto from Yale University, Hiro Yoshikawa from Harvard University and Kim Boller from Mathematica Policy Research Inc, along with experts from 5 NGOs in the ISSA network, which are partners in the project (members from Armenia, Bosnia, Moldova, Serbia and Slovenia). ACEV/Turkey and Comenius Foundation/Poland have also joined the projects as partners. ACEV arranged site visits to their and KEDV's programs in coordination with the first meeting, thus making the event a valuable learning experience. Participants also listened to a presentation by Prof. Kagitçibaşı at the project's first meeting.

Areas of community-based/non-formal work were identified during the meeting, including integrated centers, parenting programs (mother, father, mixed that includes children), family visits, cooperatives, play groups, child to child, daycare held in people's homes etc. It was decided that in this project the task will be to identify innovative, state of the art; research informed or evidence based programs focused on the following:

- 0-3 age group (SbS Developmental Research Centre, Slovenia/Tatjana Vonta will lead)
- Transitions/bridges - children moving from pre-primary to primary (Step by Step Educational Program, Moldova/Cornelia Cincilei will lead);
- 4-6 age group - focus on children from vulnerable groups who are out of centers (Centre for Interactive Pedagogy, Serbia/Milena Mihajlovic will lead);

Planning meetings with project stakeholders to fine-tune the project's work plan were also organized during the Regional Meeting in Zagreb in June and the Riga events in July. A revised work plan was agreed upon with all project stakeholders in the Summer and then again in the Autumn, outlining activities for the rest of the year.

Project partners agreed to develop an overview of community-based/non-formal programs that are available. This mapping would include 10-12 examples of quality community-based/non-formal programs or resources identified and documented in the 3 categories mentioned above. Project partners were not able to finalize the mapping in 2010, and they found that various mappings were conducted by other international organizations. They also shared that their motivation is much more to focus on implementation rather than mapping. Two ISSA representatives involved in the project attended the Consultative Group's meeting on *Transitions* organized in London in October 2010, bringing back new insights and information on trends, resources and initiatives from the rest of the world. Their report, which also included results of a large relevant international mapping, was shared with project partners and the rest of the ISSA network in the ISSA Winter Newsletter: <http://www.issa.nl/newsletter/10/winter/part3.html>. It was agreed that stakeholders will discuss in early 2011 how to further continue the project.

Partner/Funder: OSI through an Innovative Grant to ISSA; Project partners/Consultants: ISSA Member NGOs in Moldova, Serbia, Bosnia, Slovenia and Armenia; ACEV/Turkey and Comenius/Poland; external consultants

### III.2 Civil Society Partnership for Rural Children

In the first half of 2010, ISSA worked on finalizing the EU/TACIS-funded project with co-funding from OSI, which took place in Kazakhstan in partnership with Community Foundation Step by Step Kazakhstan and Comenius Foundation Poland, with ISSA as lead partner.

The goal of the project, which took place between August 2008 – August 2010, was to support every child's right to education by developing models of child-centered, cost-effective early education services for rural areas. All activities were implemented according to the schedule laid out in the proposal; top priorities included site visits and provision of trainings. The project team spent time mobilizing resources: courses for parents, materials for parents and children (translated into two languages to prepare parent facilitators for their work), support with follow-up workshops, and consultations during site visits. Site visits and local trainings took place in Kaskelen, Kyrgaldy 21-22 January, and Talgar, Kaskelen 1-3 February. In late February, the workshop Increasing Access to Education Services was held in Karacay, Kaskelen for 26 participants and in Talgar with 27 participants. In early March, a training of trainers entitled Consolidation of Efforts Working with Local Governments was held in Talgar.

In addition to the trainings, Kazakh partners published the leaflet Social Partnership, which was disseminated during all trainings, meetings, and activities, as well as on the website [www.taitai.com](http://www.taitai.com). Meetings with local government took place, when heads of Talgar and Karasay rayons education departments Ulday Barhrinova, Klara Abdykalikova, principals - Uschinsky Saule Battalova School, Tolstoy Bazarkhan Kapparova School, kindergarten "Sandugash" - Zhanat Bagandykova, kindergarten #2 – Olga Kotorova, deputy Akim Akima – Raykhan Sadykova, social worker Amina Balzhabayeva and Kazakh partner project staff discussed the influence of the project and underlined the following:

1. Increasing the capacity of parent facilitators in advocating a democratic approach in the education process.
2. Empowering parents with information, knowledge, and skills in assisting children to prepare for formal schooling.
3. Increasing the interest of local governments in the initiatives and increasing their desire to change strategy to provide possibilities for children who have no access to education services.
4. Positive steps made by Irgely akimat – They renovated a small space to allow 15-17 children to stay for half a day with a teacher from the primary school.
5. Negotiations are in progress to have a space in Kaskelen to welcome children on Saturday or Sunday, but the team/local partners are still searching for a teacher for this.

The project provided an opportunity for an interesting synergy between the OSI initiative in evaluation of Getting Ready for School program and the activities carried out under the TACIS project. It was also an opportunity to learn from the experience of Comenius Foundation in Poland and to adapt some of their approaches and resources.

Experts from Comenius Foundation Poland visited the project site in Kazakhstan several times to provide training and mentoring, sharing their successful experiences and lessons learned in creating preschool programs in Poland in rural areas where there are no preschools. Responding directly to the needs of local communities, the project team piloted models which rely on training parent facilitators to work with parents of young children with no access to preschool, and has also explored making facilities within primary schools available, for example, on weekends, when there is more availability of space. An important step after completion of the project was to successfully report to the EU and OSI on the project.

Partners: Community Foundation Step by Step Kazakhstan and Comenius Foundation Poland, external consultants  
Funders: EU - grant to ISSA as main implementer and OSI, through cost-share grant to ISSA

### **III.3 Reading Corner Books and Activity Kits with methodologies to promote early literacy and family support to child's development**

Early in the year, in response to the devastating earthquake in Haiti, ISSA staff and experts from member NGOs worked under a tight deadline to create activities to go with the three Reading Corner books written and illustrated by Haitian authors and illustrators. These activities are intended to be used by parents or caregivers with groups of children in the earthquake areas.

It was initially planned that the books will be distributed as part of an emergency package developed and managed by UNICEF. ISSA provided these resources, and although it is not certain that they will be used in the UNICEF initiatives, these resources are now available to Tipa Tipa, ISSA's member in Haiti, and to other stakeholders.

In developing these resources, ISSA drew on the expertise of member NGOs who have dealt with emergency and traumatic situations, as well as the input of the Tipa Tipa team to ensure that all included activities were sensitive and appropriate for the situation at hand.

### **III.4 ISSA Network's participation in international initiatives related to Goal III**

As a result of ISSA's close cooperation with **Eurochild** and the **Comenius Foundation** from Poland, in May 2010, representatives from ISSA Member Organizations Helena Buric (Croatia) and Dragana Koruga (Croatia) participated in a Study Visit on Inclusion to Poland *Working in an Inclusive Way with Children and Families, Across Agencies and Age Groups*. The study visit was part of an ongoing program "Working for Inclusion" which is a cross-European program examining how improving qualification of skills of those working with our youngest children can help reduce poverty and improve social inclusion. The program was led by Children in Scotland, in partnership with The Comenius Foundation for Child Development (Poland), La Bottega Di Geppetto (Italy), and Nordland Research Institute (Norway). Support for the ISSA representatives to join the study visit was provided by Eurochild and the Open Society Institute. A report from ISSA's representatives on the visit is available on the ISSA website: [http://www.issa.nl/news\\_poland01.html](http://www.issa.nl/news_poland01.html)

Also as a result of ISSA's partnership with **Eurochild**, two ISSA representatives (from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro) will attend the Eurochild Members' Exchange Seminar on Community-based ECD, organized in Tallinn in October 2010. At this event ISSA representatives presented on the network's experiences in community-based ECD, in a session showcasing successful approaches among Eurochild members. The session was chaired by one of the ISSA representatives. A report on their participation in this event is available in the ISSA Winter Newsletter: <http://www.issa.nl/newsletter/10/winter/part4.html>.

In both of these international initiatives ISSA members were able to showcase the experience of the network in community-based ECD, and at the same time bring back to the network information on new trends, resources and approaches, to further support ISSA's work in this field.

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

### **Overview of Progress under Goal IV**

In 2010 there was revitalized communication, horizontal sharing, peer learning, programmatic cooperation and in general increased member engagement. Regional Meetings were a successful step towards building shared understanding around Principles of Quality Pedagogy and strengthening ISSA as a learning community. The three regional meetings and the two Council Meetings also validated the direction established by the new Strategy Framework and the operational mechanisms identified in the strategic planning process which ended in 2009. ISSA's priorities under the four Strategic Goals were enthusiastically endorsed. Important steps were taken towards clarifying and strengthening governance and operational structures, and towards more strategically supporting knowledge creation/dissemination and the work of collaborative communities. ISSA also began building capacity in the network to work with IT tools.

### **IV. 1 Member Engagement**

During 2010 there was revitalized communication in the network, exchange of information and engagement in different activities by ISSA members. Regional meetings, the mapping project, the process of revising the Principles of Quality Pedagogy and development of supporting materials for their use, implementation of two OSI-funded innovative grants, the International Conference on Inclusive Approaches, development of the online course for kindergarten teachers, the DECET partnership, member exchanges, the process of clarifying governance and operational structures and several other activities received high interest and participation from members. The efforts of Regional Anchors also contributed to increased involvement and exchange of information.

Participation in the regional meetings and the two Council Meetings was highly appreciated by members; the meetings were welcomed as an opportunity to share their success and challenges in program implementation and being in a learning community, opinions and suggestions for mutual cooperation and support as well as openly discuss challenges and common interests. Members regard regular in-person meetings as the most effective and rewarding way to have a professional community and to recharge themselves professionally and emotionally. While Special Interest Groups will use online tools for their work, members concluded that online cooperation can be effective only if coupled with in-person meetings.

In 2010 more than 1/3 of the Council Members served on governance and operational bodies:

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

The Organizational Chart, revised at the end of 2010, is available on the ISSA Online Community among documents saved in the Board Group: <http://www.issa.nl/oc/index.php/groups/viewgroup/11-ISSA+Board>. 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 Council Meeting and was continued by the Secretariat and the Board at the end of 2010 and beginning of 2011, to be 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 may also be found at the link above:

- 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 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. While the vast majority of members has been involved in network-wide initiatives like the mapping project, in 2010 more than 2/3 of the members were engaged in other programmatic initiatives and partnership projects led by ISSA, or in which ISSA is a partner, carried out both with funding from OSI and with funding from other sources.

A number of Special Interest Groups (SIGs) are already active in ISSA, working through a combination of online communication (beginning to use the ISSA Online Community) and in-person meetings:

- the Core Group of Quality Experts worked to develop materials in ISSA's Resource Pack on Quality Pedagogy: small groups are working on specific resources including those for different partnership projects like the online course or the Roma Pilot AGS project.
- partners were working to implement the two projects funded with OSI Innovative Grants: the Smooth Transition Project and the Education for Social Justice Project
- a group of Russian-speaking members from the Core Group of Quality Experts actively worked on specific tasks, like translating materials, developing the Glossary, peer-mentoring and launching of ISSA's resources in Russian

New SIGs were formed during the October Professional Development Event, when groups worked on preparing partnership projects and funding proposals to be sent to relevant calls for applications at the end of 2010 and in 2011. In order to support this effort, the Secretariat prepared a chart with relevant EU calls for applications, which was disseminated at the events in July and October. The initiatives developed by the SIGs feed into ISSA's Work Plan for 2011. As a result of the SIG's work, new proposals were sent to donors, including a proposal to OSI for phase two of the ESJ Project, and to the European Commission, a Tempus application.

While regional meetings provided a framework for more informal exchanges, during the October meetings a special session was devoted to sharing of innovations and successes among ISSA members. Several NGOs presented their projects and showcased new resources developed. This kind of exchange was highly appreciated and members suggested that more such sessions be organized in the future.

## **IV. 2 Reputation of the ISSA Network Strengthened Internationally**

Engaging in regional and international initiatives has further raised visibility and credibility for ISSA and its members as ECDE professionals. As a result, ISSA is perceived more strongly as THE ECDE network for CEE/CIS by international organizations and governmental bodies in the region. Such reputation and recognition, as acknowledged by members, helps them to more successfully engage in dialogue with decision-makers and receive support from international donor organizations at the country level. Members reported that increased international visibility and credibility is a valuable service and benefit from ISSA, which should continue and be strengthened in the future.

With facilitation from and in-kind support raised by the Secretariat, several members represented ISSA in international initiatives, showcasing the successes and expertise of the network, and bringing back into the network information on new trends, resources and approaches. After every participation in such initiatives, those

who represented ISSA prepared reports which were shared by the Secretariat with members and the wider public via ISSA's communication tools: external website, Newsletter and the Online Community. Specific international initiatives in which ISSA members were involved are described above under the Program/Advocacy Strategic Goals. At the ISSA level, increased cooperation and partnerships with relevant major international agencies, networks, organizations and donors from different parts of the world (with special attention to those working more actively or having significant representation from the CEE/CIS region, with specific link to the strategic goals) strengthens ISSA's capacity to advocate, as well as to make sure that the voice of the region is strongly and accurately represented in international fora and discussions.

### **IV. 3 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.

A joint ISSA/DECET online platform was piloted in the first half of 2010 on **KARL**, a Knowledge Management System (KMS) developed by OSI. The intention was for this to be a joint ISSA/DECET KMS platform for:

- supporting collaborative communities to jointly create new knowledge
- sharing information within and across the two networks
- organizing and storing information
- communicating within the network and across networks
- planning events

Several communities/SIGs piloted KARL, including ISSA's Core Group of Quality Experts and the DECET/ISSA Work Pack on Professionalism in ECD. At the same time ISSA has been exploring different Learning Management Systems (LMS), in order to choose a tool for the online course being developed with IBM funding. A consultant was hired to explore different options, and in the end ISSA decided it is most efficient to use the same tool for both KMS and LMS purposes. After in-depth research, **Joomla** was identified as the best option. It is more user-friendly and cheaper to use than KARL and it has all the features of KARL, plus it supports distance learning and teleconferencing (which KARL does not).

During the summer of 2010 the structure of the ISSA Online Community ([www.issa.nl/oc](http://www.issa.nl/oc)) was developed on Joomla and in October the platform was introduced to ISSA members providing them the opportunity to register. The ISSA Online community provides members with a comprehensive tool for communicating, sharing experiences, develop interest groups and partnerships on projects, as well as for accessing all resources developed within ISSA and be 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.

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

- **Intranet** – internal communication tool for the network: news from members, network news, 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.
- **Online Education** – support online course offered by ISSA or its members. The first course is the result of a project funded by IBM – a Course for Kindergarten Teachers (under development).

In 2011, the Secretariat will work with other ISSA Bodies to develop a plan for strategically using this powerful tool and to determine how widely should access be offered to online resources (e.g. only to ISSA voting and affiliate members). Plans will also be made to offer the tool in Russian, and to translate the ISSA organizational resources, as part of an effort to continue to strengthen ISSA as a bilingual association.

#### IV. 4 Membership/NGO Development

Capacity building among its core 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 throughout 2010 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. This included providing the opportunity for a number of representatives of the network to participate in international initiatives and events, to learn and contribute, as well as bring back to the network new information and resources (see details under Goal I, II and III). In the vast majority of cases, the Secretariat raised in-kind support from the organizers, who covered costs of ISSA members' participation.

#### IV. 5 Strategic Planning – Work Plan 2011

Already in the first half of 2010, especially during regional meetings, discussions started on priorities to be included in the Work Plan for 2011. Significant time was devoted during the October meetings when members jointly developed a Concept of Main Priorities for Achieving ISSA's Strategic Goals in the 2011 Work Plan. In October, through an interactive exercise members also identified areas where they feel they are already major players in their national context, as well as areas for desired further growth. Results were summarized in a Chart with Members' Current Areas of Strength and Intended Areas of Growth. These will inform the ISSA Work Plan, both in terms of where it is possible to draw upon existing expertise, and what kind of professional development and support services ISSA should offer to members. These documents resulting from the October meetings are available on: <http://issa.nl/oc/index.php/organizational-info>.

Building upon consensus reached and information gathered at the October meetings, the Secretariat and the Program Committee worked on the Draft Work Plan and Budget 2011, to be finalized during the February 2011 Meetings, when there will be a Program Committee Meeting and a Board Meeting. The draft is available on: <http://issa.nl/oc/index.php/groups/viewgroup/11-ISSA+Board>. Once the Plan is reviewed, discussed and endorsed by the Board, the Plan and the Summary Budget will be present to the Council for an electronic vote. Negotiations will continue with OSI for the General Support Grant 2011 within the framework of the Work Plan.

ISSA's Work Plan 2011 is 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 are 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. Activities aim at **building capacity among ISSA Member NGOs**, both as ECD

experts/professionals and as strong entities of civil society. Many activities are complex and contribute to implementing more than one goal. In order to avoid repetition, they are mentioned only once under the strategic goal which is most relevant. A degree of flexibility is built in, in order to be able to later include additional activities and to flexibly respond to new opportunities. As new opportunities arise (through expressions of interest from members or potential partnerships/funding opportunities), the options will be discussed with the **Program Committee**, before project proposals are developed. The **ISSA Board** ultimately has authority to approve contracts for financial decisions over 25,000 EUR, as required by ISSA regulations.

The Plan identifies the following network-wide priorities:

- **Ensure that the ISSA network continues to be at the forefront of innovations:** Support will be offered to members to work with the recently finalized resources in ISSA's Resource Pack for Quality Pedagogy, 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. Through new partnership projects, new resources are continuously developed and offered to members.
- **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 ensure shared understanding of quality pedagogy and support 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 are met through the following **Operational Mechanisms**:

- **Community Building:** promote values and link membership into strong community
- **Capacity Building:** develop resources and strengthen professionalism in education
- **Amplifier:** advocacy; public information and education
- **Convener:** network representation and partnership building

## IV. 6 Governance: Council and Board Matters

Meetings: During the first half of 2010, ISSA organized a Board Meeting in February in London, to coincide with a meeting hosted by OSI's ECP Program, focusing on the OSI/ISSA relationship. A Board Meeting and Council Meeting were organized in July in Latvia, followed by a Board Meeting as well as a Council Meeting/Professional Development Event in October 2010 in Turkey. Minutes of the Board and Council Meetings are available on the ISSA Online Community, in the Organizational Info section: <http://issa.nl/oc/index.php/organizational-info>.

The Nominations Committee worked on preparing and running the 2010 Board Elections, which will take place during the October meeting. The results of these elections, including the new Board Officers are shown on: [http://www.issa.nl/board\\_directors.html](http://www.issa.nl/board_directors.html).

Revisions to the ISSA Statutes to reflect decisions in the recent strategic planning process were finalized during the October Council Meeting. The revised Statutes will be registered in The Netherlands in early 2011. During and after the October meetings there was an in-depth process to clarify ISSA's operational and governance framework (see above under Member Engagement IV.1). The only issues still to be discussed and agreed upon are a couple of membership matters related to a code of conduct in the network, such as the issue of competition among members. These will be addressed and resolved during meetings in 2011.

The position of Regional Anchors was clarified during 2010. Although this position is not entirely new, 2010 was the first year when RAs are performing their tasks according to the framework of the new Strategy – in 2009 their

role was strictly related to Strategic Planning. In 2010, in addition to actively being involved in preparing and running regional meetings, RAs also worked on communication and membership issues, and assisted with planning of horizontal exchanges and peer-mentoring.

ISSA's Program Committee provided input on several program matters, including development of potential funding proposals and partnership projects, the Program Director Job Description, and the composition of the Program Team. The Committee also decided on the funds budgeted for member exchanges and technical assistance. See above information on the Study Visit to Croatia. The role and profile of the Program Committee was clarified at the end of 2010, to be finalized in early 2011.

## IV. 7 Communications, Marketing and PR

In 2010 ISSA worked on streamlining communication, and developed a Framework for Communication and Information Flow, available on: <http://issa.nl/oc/index.php/groups/viewgroup/11-ISSA+Board>.

Here is a summary of the main efforts:

- The ISSA Secretariat continued to send out *monthly program updates* to the Board and Council, as well as to OSI. 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 sent out *information on relevant events and program/advocacy/organizational development resources*. Once the Online Community was set up, email communication was replaced to uploading the relevant information there.
- 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*.
- ISSA distributed two issues of its *Newsletter* in the Summer and Winter. They were circulated by email to members and partners, and are available on the external website.
- The *ISSA Online Community* - a new KMS/LMS platform - was launched in the second half of 2010 to serve as ISSA's new *Intranet* (with content management functions), as well as platform for Special Interest Group and online courses.
- ISSA also explored options and ways to most effectively launch a *Facebook page* possibly in 2011, depending on stakeholders' interest. This platform would reach out to the networks of members in their countries: trainers, teachers etc. Plans for this were put on hold.
- In addition to a couple of programmatic publications (the Executive Summary of the Study on Use of Standards, the re-printed version of the revised ISSA Principles, the Book on Vygotsky) several *promotional materials* were prepared for dissemination at the Riga events and beyond: ISSA stand, leaflet with recent/upcoming publications, summary of Strategy Framework, ISSA pin, posters etc.
- The vast majority of printed and electronic publications were released in both English and Russian.

## IV. 8 Resource Mobilization: Fundraising/Income Generation

Unfortunately, due to the Program Director position being vacant for 8 months in 2010, ISSA did not submit as many funding requests as it had in the past. A proposal for a service contract submitted in the spring of 2010 in partnership with Romani CRISS to the Romanian Ministry of Education was turned down, after a very close competition – the selected consortium made up of two Romanian Consulting Firms scored 95.75 points versus the ISSA/Romani CRISS consortium scoring 93.74 out of 100 points. A proposal submitted by REF in 2009 with ISSA as a partner, to develop a Network on Roma inclusion, was also turned down.

ISSA also pursued other sources of funding with some degree of success:

- ISSA continues to pursue income opportunities through the Reading Corner project. To this end ISSA created a sell-sheet flyer which was distributed at over 500 trainings in the US Head Start system,

marketing the books to a vast audience of preschools/Head Start centers with an interest in multi-lingual books. Although several trainings took place, no increase in book sales occurred so far, unfortunately. However, as a result of other marketing efforts, ISSA is pleased to report two orders of several hundred books each, one from a library in the US and one in Europe.

- On the Riga 2010 Conference, ISSA is happy to report that in addition to subsidies being offered to ISSA members and to Latvian participants, ISSA staff time costs were covered, and the three co-organizers (DISES, CEI and ISSA) were able to split a small excess revenue amounting to approx. 2,000 EURO each.
- IBM has hired ISSA on a small service contract to review ECD resources developed with IBM funding in the US. There is potential that ISSA members may be hired to work on adapting and disseminating relevant resources in the CEE/CIS region.
- ISSA has been successful in raising 16,000 EURO worth of in-kind contributions towards its own budget and approximately 18,000 EUROS to cover costs for ISSA network representatives to take part in international initiatives. As a result of ISSA's work, and the efforts of partners co-hosting the Riga Conference, significant in-come contributions were also raised towards this event.
- At the end of the year, ISSA successfully delivered consulting services to the Ministry of Education in Lebanon, to develop a reference tool for educational resources. Negotiations also started with Aga Khan Foundation in Kyrgyzstan to deliver a training to authors of children's books.

In 2010 negotiations began with Bernard van Leer Foundation and Roma Education Fund on a grant to supplement capacity building activities in the Roma Pilot A Good Start project. Discussions began also with UNICEF on the possibility for ISSA to join as a partner in the Roma Good Start Initiative, funded by the EU, and implemented by UNICEF in partnership with OSI and REF. All these negotiations will continue in 2011, and if fundraising efforts are successful, implementation will be carried out by ISSA in partnership with members in relevant countries, who were consulted at every step of the negotiations. At the end of 2010 ISSA began exploring possibilities to apply for EU grants in 2011 – work will continue in early 2011 to meet the deadlines.

Efforts to support members in their own fundraising/income generation included:

- Joint fundraising proposals – a large number of calls for applications were explored in the first half of 2010, during brainstorming with members and other partners. In the end ISSA decided not to apply because it would have been impossible to produce a strong application in the absence of a Program Director. Proposals could have been developed possibly with others as lead partners, but in most cases ISSA was expected to be the lead partner, which also entailed to take the lead in developing the proposal - impossible under the circumstances.
- Information on funding opportunities regularly sent to the network
- Joint income-generation – ISSA negotiated an agreement which worked in the interest of its member in Latvia. Initially co-organizers of the Riga Conference proposed that excess revenue should be split 50/50 between DISES and CEI/ISSA. ISSA was successful in negotiating that the excess revenue be split equally among DISES, CEI and ISSA, each taking 33% of the excess revenue.
- In all partnership projects, whenever possible ISSA is hiring experts from the network, through contracts signed with the NGO.

Overall, financially, ISSA was in a good position for 2010, however fundraising efforts for 2011 and beyond have been hindered in the absence of a Program Director for 8 months of the year.

As a result of efforts to make ISSA's operations as cost-effective as possible, there were savings of approximately 30,000 EURO from the OSI General Support Grant from the budget lines for regional meetings and the events in October. Approximately 10,000 were under-spent for the development of the short instrument; work on this is planned to continue in 2011.

In 2010 the percentage of OSI funding was higher than anticipated due to the fact that it was a challenge to implement the projects funded by some non-OSI sources (for instance the EU-funded Key Competences Project in Romania and the IBM-funded Online Course) because ISSA was understaffed. These funds will be rolled into 2011 and project implementation continues.

Here is the breakdown of 2010 spending across the different **sources of funding**:

Source of funding	Percentage
OSI	69%
EU	10%
Other sources	15%
Sales	6%
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>100%</b>

And across the main **budget categories**:

Budget Category	2009 Actual	2010 Actual
<b>Total Expenses in EUR</b>	<b>974,202</b>	<b>903,053</b>
Administration Costs	17%	16%
Strengthening Network Capacity (Strategic Goal IV)	22%	18%
Advocacy/Programs (Strategic Goals I-III)	55%	62%
Fundraising/Income Generation (including direct costs of sales)	6%	4%
<b>Total %:</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## IV. 9 Financial Management

In the spring of 2010 ISSA conducted the audits for ISSA NL and ISSA HU, its two legal entities. The audit report for ISSA HU has been shared with the ISSA HU Supervisory Board, who reviewed it and reported no concerns. The audit report for ISSA NL was first shared with the Audit Committee for their review and then presented to the Board and Council during the October meetings. The 2009 Consolidated ISSA Audit Report is available on: <http://issa.nl/oc/index.php/component/content/article/102-organizational-archive/134-annexes-to-narrative-report-jan-june-2010>.

## IV. 10 Human Resources – hiring new ISSA Program Director

At the beginning of 2010, ISSA's Program Director, Aija Tuna announced that she wishes to work for ISSA as part-time consultant. After consultations with the ISSA Board, Regional Anchors and the Program Committee, ISSA launched a recruitment campaign for a new PD, with an application deadline of May 21. The process was as follows:

- during the February 2010 Board meeting the ISSA Board discussed lessons learnt from the 2006-2009 period, when Aija Tuna served as PD
- the PD Job Description was revised with input from the Board, the Regional Anchors and the Program Committee.
- Expectations from Secretariat in terms of program- related services and specifically from the PD were discussed with members at regional meetings and informal consultations.
- The announcement on ISSA seeking a new PD was widely circulated among the ISSA network of members and partners, on the website, in relevant publications etc.
- A Search Committee was set up with Board members and Regional Anchors serving on it: Cornelia Cincilei (RA), Milena Mihajlovic (RA/Board Member), Regina Sabaliauskiene (RA/Board Member), Siobhan Fitzpatrick (ISSA President) and Liana Ghent (ISSA Executive Director). After interviewing pre-selected candidates and consulting with referees they unanimously selected a finalist – Mihaela Ionescu.
- With input from the Program Committee and Regional Anchors a chart was prepared outlining division of responsibilities among members of the ISSA Program Team, distinguishing the following functions:

leadership, management/coordination/fundraising, communication/coordination/mapping members' needs and strengths, strategy: planning, strategy: setting direction, content/technical assistance/mentoring.

- ISSA conducted a benchmarking exercise comparing the benefits/salary package offered by ISSA with the package offered by ERRC (another OSI international spin-off) for a very similar position/candidate profile. OSI colleagues also provided information on packages offered to OSI employees.
- The ISSA Board was consulted on the decision to hire the finalist.
- The offer was successfully made and the new PD was able to join the Riga events in July. She relocated to Budapest and started on the job towards the end of August.

In order to successfully implement the 2010 Work Plan (including activities carried over from 2009), the Secretariat divided tasks among staff available and hired consultants for programmatic work. Despite the vacant PD position between January-September, ISSA managed to successfully honor its commitments to members and donors; but there was also a downside in this situation: the danger of burnout for remaining staff and hindered efforts in fundraising for 2011.

Partner/Funder: OSI, through installments of 2010 General Support Grant; Other Funding for Goal IV: own income .