

ISSA Annual Report

2012



INTERNATIONAL
STEP by STEP
ASSOCIATION

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General Overview

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1. INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL OVERVIEW

Founded upon ISSA's vision and mission, and aligned with a 10-year organizational vision, the Strategy Framework for 2010-2012 identified four strategic goals, which were developed in a way to ensure continuity and build upon ISSA's previous successes. These goals in the Strategy Framework are also closely aligned with priorities identified by ISSA's main donor, the Open Society Foundations (OSF), in their own strategy, as both ISSA and OSF continue to focus on promoting quality and equity in early childhood care and education in the region, building on the investments made by OSF in CEE/CIS. In order to promote the quality and sustainability of OSF's investment, ISSA provides Step by Step NGOs and other members with means to deliver new high quality early childhood content, thus keeping their competitive edge in their countries as innovative organizations. The association also provides NGOs with a structure through which they can develop long-term regional and international early childhood collaborative partnerships, both within the network and with other organizations and potential donors.

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

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

Specific **network –wide priorities** in the 2012 Work Plan included:

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

- Support was envisaged to be offered to members to work with:
 - o the recently finalized resources in ISSA's Resource Pack for Quality Pedagogy in the framework of the Quality Assurance and Improvement Strategy 2012-2014 and to also enrich their expertise in developing professional learning communities by using the Pack;
 - o the ACEV's Fathers Support Program training program and resources for implementing parenting support programs;
 - o online tools for distance education and facilitation of collaborative initiatives and peer-learning.

B. Support ISSA as a learning community:

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

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

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

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

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

This report provides information about the stage of implementation between January-June 2012 of all the activities planned for 2012, including a brief analysis of successes, achievements, barriers and challenges encountered by the association.

2. MAIN ACTIVITIES FOR REACHING STRATEGIC GOALS

ISSA's work in 2012 was carried out within the framework of its Work Plan 2012, with two open grants from OSF and six grants/contracts from non-OSF sources. The Work Plan included a number of initiatives which had started in 2011, and were rolled over into 2012 (especially under Goal I and II).

Pillar I - Promote access and equity of care and education for young children

Overview of Progress under Goal I

The main focus of ISSA's work in this goal revolved around taking further ISSA's work in Education for Social Justice, by supporting members to use resources for advocacy and for supporting learning communities to translate ESJ principles into practice. ISSA also worked on developing an Education for Diversity online course based on the resources and expertise capitalized throughout the years by working in this field in partnership with ISSA's member organization in Serbia – CIP - Center for Interactive Pedagogy. The development of the online course was possible due to a successful partnership with OSF and with UNESCO, who expressed its interest in piloting this course in Serbian language. In a number of other partnership projects, ISSA was engaged in development of new resources, trainings and advocacy promoting access for Roma children to quality early education services.

Objectives:

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

1.1. Third phase of the Education for Social Justice Project

In this phase of the Education for Social Justice Project, the following activities were carried out in 2012:

- Experts from the project team drafted a template *Resource library of activities for practitioners – Principles of inclusion, diversity and education for democracy in classrooms* for collecting new resources. Examples of 81 activities from literature were collected and placed in the template and shared with the ISSA network through a special library on the Online Community within the Social Inclusion Group. All resources have been posted on the ISSA Online Community: <http://www.issa.nl/oc/index.php/groups/viewgroup/5-Social+Inclusion>;
- In the library mentioned above, some examples from the network were also collected and shared
- A special interest group for the project – entitled Social Inclusion - was set up on the ISSA Online Community where relevant files were posted and discussions were opened. Interested members were invited to join.
- Following up on plans developed in October 2011, during a meeting of representatives of NGOs which had expressed interest in participating in the project, 5 ESJ campaigns were developed:
 - o The Center for Educational Initiatives Step by Step (Bosnia and Herzegovina), the Open Academy Step by Step (Croatia) and CIP - Centre for Interactive Pedagogy (Serbia) worked on the campaign *The Change Starts in Each of Us*;
 - o The Center for Innovations in Education – Azerbaijan worked on a campaign *Social Justice in Education - Photography & Video Art made with use of mobile phones*;
 - o A joint campaign was carried out by the Kosovo Education Center (Kosovo) and Qendra Hap Pas Hapi (Albania);

- Foundation for Educational Initiatives Support (Kyrgyzstan) worked on the campaign *The Importance of Social Justice – the Step by Step Educational Program*;
- The Step by Step Program (Moldova) worked on the campaign *The Beauty of Diversity - Making families and communities visible on the classroom and school level*.
- All products resulting from these campaigns will be collected in a catalogue and posted on the ISSA Online Community, including leaflets, CDs, short video clips, as well as agendas for different types of ESJ trainings with different target groups. The best products will be translated in English and Russian. To provoke more ideas for activities in campaigns, an online library on advocacy campaigns/activities from all around the world was initiated by the project team: <http://www.issa.nl/oc/index.php/groups/viewdiscussion/27-Examples+of+advocacy+campaigns.html?groupid=15>
- An Online ESJ course is being developed. A first draft of the 6 modules in English was ready by the end of the year. After finalizing the draft, piloting in Serbian is scheduled to begin in the first half of 2013.
- The ESJ program was presented with great success in May 2012 in Barcelona at the European Training of Trainers organized by DECET in partnership with ISSA.

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

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

Given ISSA's strong expertise in the field of Quality ECD and Roma Education, the invitation from Roma Education Fund to join a two year partnership project was pursued in 2010 within the *A Good Start* (AGS) project, an EU DG Regio-funded project coordinated by Roma Education Fund, which started in June 2010 and ended in June 2012. The project was implemented in 16 communities from Macedonia, Romania, Hungary, and Slovakia. Within this project, ISSA's contribution focused on providing capacity building for the human resources involved in the implementation of the project around quality practices in inclusive learning environments, as well as building social justice in the selected communities.

In order to build on the expertise of ISSA member NGOs in the four countries, they were hired as consultants in the project and provided trainings to teachers, Roma mediators and other professionals working in community centers set up in the project. ISSA member NGOs trained during the project 186 teachers and 36 mediators. Most of the trainings for teachers focused on: child centered methodology, child holistic development and the importance of the early years, education for social justice and multicultural education, quality inclusive practices and parenting support. The training for mediators focused on mediation and communication skills, education for social justice, child development and quality early childhood practices, parenting support and school-family-community liaison.

Another contribution of ISSA to the AGS project in 2011 was the development of the *Continuum for Assessing the Quality Early Childhood Inclusive Practices* in center/community/home-based learning environments to be used by REF country-facilitators in their monitoring activities. The tool was accompanied by a scoring sheet and guidelines on how to be used. Two trainings were provided: one in 2010 and another one at the end of 2011 to REF country facilitators. The tool will be made available to all ISSA members after being reviewed by the Program Committee. Plans will be made to also translate it into Russian.

ISSA also contributed to the project by developing a *Guidebook of Good Practice for Quality Practices in Inclusive Early Childhood Learning Environments* and by hosting a Transnational Workshop on Quality Inclusive Practices for educators, in Bratislava in May 2012. The workshop was highly appreciated by participants and the cooperation with Nadacia Skola Dokoran, ISSA's member in Slovakia, played an important role in the success of this activity. The Guidebook was put together by the following team: Zorica Trikić (main author), Mihaela Ionescu (coordinator) and Dawn Tankersley (revision). The Guidebook was made available to ISSA members by being posted on the ISSA Online Community and more widely to other relevant stakeholders by being posted on the ISSA external website - http://www.issa.nl/news_issa_resources_developed.html. It was also shared with REYN members and advertised via newsletters of partner organizations (Eurochild, CG etc).

ISSA was also involved in providing feedback on one of the two Policy Papers which were planned to be developed based on the AGS experience to be submitted to the European Commission. By June 2012, ISSA gave feedback on the Policy Paper regarding the use of European Structural Funds for supporting Early Childhood Inclusive Services and Policies for Roma Children. The final versions of the two policy papers have not been shared with ISSA by the end of 2012.

On the 4th of June 2012 the Project had a closing conference in Brussels where ISSA was represented by:

- Eva Koncokova – Wide Open School Foundation/Slovakia
- Carmen Anghelescu – Center for Education and Professional Development Step by Step/Romania
- Eva Deak – Partners Hungary Foundation/Hungary

Although a very important and large European project on Roma Early Childhood Inclusion, the A Good Start Project lacked a strong and consistent focus on strengthening the expertise of the human resources working directly with the children and their families in the project. Therefore, a joint ISSA-REF proposal was submitted in March 2011 and approved by the Bernard van Leer Foundation. The additional support was provided for additional AGS activities in a one year-project – between June 2011 and June 2012. ISSA's role in the new project activities was to work on strengthening the capacity building component of the AGS EU-funded project (which was not sufficiently strong in the original proposal sent to the EU) in four communities involved in the project, by providing (in addition to the traditional trainings within the project), mentoring and follow-up visits on a monthly basis to teachers and mediators, to further support the improvement of their professional skills in working with Roma children and their families. According to the internal monitoring reports, the capacity building activities proved to be successful since improvements in teachers' practices and the learning environment were highlighted, following the indicators in the *Continuum for Assessing Quality Early Childhood Inclusive Practices*. The project concluded in June 2012 and final reports were sent by ISSA to REF for a consolidated report to be submitted to BvLF and to the Commission. At the end of 2012, ISSA received a notification from REF that the Final Report on the AGS project was approved by the European Commission.

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

Partners: Roma Education Fund, Nadacia Skola Dokoran – Slovakia, Partners - Hungary, CEDP – Romania, FECIM – Macedonia, CIP - Serbia

1.3. Key Competences in Primary Schools Project

Due to poor coordination on the part of the project's Management Unit team, in the end ISSA's contribution to this project was cancelled. There was no specific work plan or request for concrete input shared with ISSA in due time, and therefore the money wired as advanced payment were returned and ISSA's participation was cancelled.

1.4. Additional Partnership Projects

The 2012 Work Plan had an element of flexibility built in to provide the framework for additional partnership projects around inclusion/equity in ECD services, with a focus on capacity building and advocacy. During the first half of the year negotiations were carried out with UNICEF, UNESCO, the Consultative Group and the Bernard van Leer Foundation. The following partnerships were negotiated for work beginning in 2013::

- a contract was signed with UNESCO for investing in the development and piloting of the Education for Diversity online course in Serbian language
- a contract was negotiated with the Consultative Group for a one year project providing seed funding for an ECD Advocacy Platform for CEE/CIS hosted under ISSA's umbrella. The Platform builds on a strong partnership and involvement of international stakeholders in ECD: OSF, UNICEF, Save the Children International. The founders of this Platform will work on attracting other members and partners. The Advocacy Platform will promote common key advocacy messages and will promote principles of equity, social justice and quality in ECD.

- ISSA discussed with Bernard van Leer Foundation ideas for possible joint projects in 2013, including possible projects focusing on sharing experiences between East European and West European countries in the area of social inclusion. These ideas, as well as potential involvement of the Bernard van Leer Foundation in the Advocacy Platform are to be further explored in 2013.
- ISSA continues to explore new partnerships with UNICEF, especially in the area of bringing the principles of ESJ to new audiences, for instance the home-visiting nurses.

1.5. Romani Early Years Network (REYN)

During 2012, ISSA and OSF/ECP have worked on a partnership initiative to prepare the ground for launching a Network to support the professional development of Roma ECD professionals and para-professionals, under the umbrella of ISSA as professional association. The overall goal is to make sure that the teaching staff in ECEC reflects the diversity in the society and to empower Romani professionals and para-professionals, therefore supporting equity and social justice. The Network intends to offer professional development opportunities and networking mechanisms among Roma and non-Roma ECD professionals. In the first half of 2012, ISSA hired a lead consultant – Laura Surdu – to research the needs and professional aspirations of potential future members of such a Network. Partnership agreements were also developed with 10 ISSA member NGOs. A survey template and protocols for conducting peer group discussions were developed and shared with ISSA member NGOs in the 10 countries taking part in this mapping initiative. Surveys were translated and disseminated with the help of the NGOs; the ISSA Secretariat collected and processed the responses. A database of 600 potential respondents was created, based on suggestions from members and partners, and close to 400 completed surveys were collected from respondents. The lead researcher visited two countries (Serbia and the Czech Republic) to conduct peer group discussions, and in the other eight countries local facilitators were hired for this purpose. Reports from all the group discussions were collected by the Secretariat, along with lists of participants, and lists of those who recommended potential respondents for the survey, and of those to whom the surveys were sent. All data was introduced in a database, to serve the development of a report, and to provide later contact info for potential network members. The report was finalized in its first draft by early Autumn, when ISSA and ECP also began to plan activities related to the launch of the Network during the ISSA/DECET Conference in October in Opatija/Croatia.

In September 2012, Open Society Foundation's Roma 'Kopači' initiatives of the Early Childhood Programme (OSF/ECP) and ISSA organized a planning meeting in Budapest, where consultants from OSF and the ISSA network together with representatives of OSF's Roma 'Kopači' initiatives of the Early Childhood Programme and the ISSA Secretariat were involved in setting the foundations for the development of the network. The main outcomes of the meeting were:

- the network was named: Romany Early Years Network (REYN),
- a first draft of a three years strategy was developed
- the plan for the first event of the network – a Workshop prior to the ISSA-DECET Conference – speakers, sessions/trainers, facilitators
- the plan of the Launch of the network – invitations, promotional materials.

The preparation of both events in Croatia (the Workshop and the Launch) in a relatively short time, required intensive work and close communication between Open Society Foundation's Roma 'Kopači' initiatives of the Early Childhood Programme and ISSA, and focused on:

- designing a logo for REYN
- recruiting and selecting participants to the workshop
- contracting trainers/facilitators and preparing the agenda of the workshop
- developing the invitation for the REYN launch
- inviting conference participants to REYN launch
- finalizing all REYN promotion materials: pins, t-shirts, bags, balloons etc.

The workshop in Opatija brought together 56 participants, Roma and non-Roma professionals working with Roma children and their families from 17 countries. The first part of the day focused on presenting the REYN's overall

goals and the partners who initiated the network, while the second part of the day aimed at providing participants with samples of activities that will be promoted in the network for contributing to the professional development of those working with Roma young children and their families. In addition, one of the sessions focused on consulting participants with regards to the REYN draft strategy, taking into account their needs: objectives, types of activities, tools for communication, platforms to be used, expected outcomes, etc. The workshop was highly appreciated by all participants and a great enthusiasm and openness for joining the network was shared during the event, which indicated a very good start and a momentum for such an initiative.

The Launch of the network took place during the first day of the ISSA-DECET Conference, via an Interactive Session in the Conference program and a Reception which brought together more than 200 conference participants. The event was highly appreciated by the guests and confirmed the need of creating such a network that will bring Roma and non-Roma professionals in ECD closer in their endeavor to improve the lives of Roma young children. More information about the REYN Launch and the Workshop may be found on ISSA's external website: http://www.issa.nl/news_issa_open_society_foundations.html.

After the Launch, the ISSA Secretariat focused on advertising the Network, setting up tools for online communication and exchanges and sending out invitations to join the network. Interested professionals and paraprofessionals working in services aimed at young Romani children (birth to 8 years) and their families in Central and Eastern Europe, South Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States and beyond are invited to join the network and take part in its activities. The plans for activities for the 2013 calendar will be announced early next year. In the meantime, those who are interested in participating in REYN as active members were encouraged to join the following **virtual platforms** - each having different communication functions:

- **The ISSA Online Community** www.issa.nl/oc where relevant ECD news is posted regularly on the 'Home' page, where resources can be accessed through an online Library, and where there are also 'Special Interest Groups', including a **REYN Group** to serve the members. This group will be used for professional discussions on themes of common interest and for announcements related to REYN's activities. Members of REYN are encouraged to update their Profile with information about their professional interests, and to engage in discussions in the REYN group and other groups.
- **The REYN Blog** reyn.blog.issa.nl is a place where members of the Network can share their ideas, experiences, reflections and insights from their work to give every Romani child a good start in life from the earliest age. Several REYN members have already posted entries!
- **The REYN Facebook Group** - www.facebook.com/groups/Romani.Early.Years.Network/ is an open group that can be used for informal communication among REYN members. Check out the photos and video clips that are already posted there from the REYN Launch!

Funder/Partner: OSF

1.6. ISSA's participation to international partnerships/meetings/initiatives focusing on Access to ECD Services

ISSA-DECET Cooperation

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

In 2012, ISSA and DECET launched a call for expression of interest to all ISSA members for participating in a **European Training of Trainers organizing by two DECET members** in May 2012, in Barcelona/Spain, where both DECET and ISSA members were invited. Representatives from 9 ISSA members have expressed their interest to attend. Five of them used the Professional Development Funds to benefit of this training of trainers. The training focused on creating an understanding of common aims towards equity and respect for diversity; learning from each other; discovering similarities and differences; transfer of innovative training methodologies; building a

network of trainers across the two networks. Jelena Vranjesevic represented ISSA as facilitator of one of the workshops and prepared a report on the event, which was shared on the Online Community, under Network News. According to the feedback received after the training, all ISSA representatives indicated that it was a very inspiring event and they have enriched their skills as trainers in the field of equity and diversity.

Participation in International Meetings and Initiatives

In order to contribute to a better positioning of ISSA as a strong professional association in the ECD international arena, as well as to reach for opportunities to acknowledge and expand the expertise capitalized by ISSA through its members, ISSA participates in international events and meetings that are closely aligned with its mission and Strategic Framework. ISSA also seeks participation in meetings that provide new opportunities for partnerships to serve ISSA members or to strengthen ISSA's positioning in the ECD international discourse. In 2012, in addition to the Barcelona training mentioned above, ISSA representatives participated in the following meetings and initiatives related to Goal I:

ISSA's Program Director represented ISSA at the RECI Report Launch event in Brussels on March 6th, hosted by OSF, UNICEF and REF.

The ED and the PD had an introductory meeting on March 5th with the new Program Officer at Bernard van Leer Foundation, who is working on EU issues and Roma ECD, to explore cooperation around the initiatives which ISSA already has in the planning, related to ESJ, Quality and Capacity Building.

The ED represented ISSA at the UNICEF Conference on Home Visiting Nurses in Ankara May 14-17 with a presentation on ISSA's potential for implementing the ESJ Program reaching to practitioners in the health sector.

ISSA was invited to join the World Forum's International Organizing Committee. Discussions continue to include participants from the ISSA network in the Global Leaders Program, depending on success in fundraising. Feedback received from previous ISSA participants in the GLP was very enthusiastic about the idea of opening this professional development opportunity to more colleagues in ISSA.

The ED and PD attended the Global Partnership for Education GPE/UNICEF High level Technical Workshop on ECD Quality in Athens on 4-6 June. ISSA was also represented by members from: Moldova, Tajikistan, Serbia, Romania, Kyrgyzstan and Macedonia. The PD made a presentation focusing on ISSA's experience and expertise in ECD in the CEE/CIS region and particularly on advocating and building capacity for improving quality of ECEC services through its extended Quality Resource Pack, building on the Step by Step experience. The ED presented on ISSA's experience in networking and supporting learning communities, and invited GPE teams to consider using ISSA's services. During the event, the PD and ED had individual discussions with the GPE teams (Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Moldova, Tajikistan) for exploring ways in which ISSA members can be involved in future plans of country teams for GPE proposals. The event was considered a good opportunity for positioning ISSA in the CEE/CIS region as a key international ECD organization and important partner for UNICEF, WB and other key stakeholders.

ISSA's ED and PD were invited to attend in Brussels on June 26 the meeting of the European Commission's Group of Stakeholder Organisations working in related fields of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and Early School Leaving (ESL). The meeting was a good opportunity to make ISSA more visible on the European level and to influence the work the EC is undertaking for the next two years through their Thematic Working Groups. The meeting was attended by important current and potential new partners for ISSA: OSF, UNICEF, BvLF, UNESCO, and several European foundations and agencies.

Linked with the European Commission meeting, the PD and ED attended Eurochild's General Assembly Meeting, a European network whose member ISSA is. For ISSA, the meeting helped in learning about the membership issues and functions of a big network of 130 members, with a strong impact on European ECEC policies. In addition, the meeting provided a very good opportunity to establish contacts, make the ISSA network and work more visible, as well as to advertise the ISSA-DECET Conference in October in Croatia.

On November 27-28, the Eurochild/ICDI Policy Roundtable on ECEC brought together 43 national member states experts, Eurochild members and other interested stakeholders from 18 countries to discuss on a European Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). ISSA PD delivered one of the three selected

key presentations, focusing on ISSA's Quality Framework. Other presentations included contributions from other two Eurochild members on how they have been seeking to address quality in ECEC. OECD representative Ineke Litjens talked about the main findings of the most recent Starting Strong reports on tools for implementation of policies to encourage quality in ECEC. Nora Milotay, from DG Education and Culture, announced that work is already ongoing, through a thematic working group of member states experts, to prepare a European ECEC Quality Framework. A background paper written by John Bennett was disseminated prior to the event, which spoke highly of the ISSA Quality Framework, as a note-worthy example. The background paper and all presentations are available on the Eurochild website:

http://www.eurochild.org/en/events/details/index.html?tx_ttnews%5b%5d=1354187978&tx_ttnews%5btt_news%5d=5224&tx_ttnews%5bbackPid%5d=287&cHash=3bb25b342f8c57ea8dd06d59d608eb04.

1.7. Roma Good Start Initiative

In the final stages of the RGSI project, in the first half of 2012, the ISSA Secretariat worked on coordinating the layout, printing and shipping of the following Roma Early Childhood Inclusion (RECI) reports:

- Roma Early Roma Early Childhood Inclusion – Overview Report
- Roma Early Roma Early Childhood Inclusion – Macedonian Report in English
- Roma Early Roma Early Childhood Inclusion – Macedonian Report in Macedonian
- Roma Early Roma Early Childhood Inclusion – Serbian Report in English
- Roma Early Roma Early Childhood Inclusion – Serbian Report in Serbian

Once printed, copies were shipped to the RECI project partners: the UNICEF Regional Office for CEE/CIS, the Open Society Foundations and the Roma Education Fund, as well as to UNICEF offices from project countries. In addition, the ISSA Secretariat submitted the final financial reports to UNICEF for the Roma Good Start Initiative Project.

Funder/Partner: UNICEF

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

Overview of Progress under Goal II

The main focus of ISSA's work in this goal was on the implementation of activities from the Quality Assurance and Improvement Strategy (QAIS) for 2012.

Objectives of the Quality Assurance and Improvement Strategy 2011-2014:

- a) Promote and keep as a priority the quality of early childhood education practices in the ISSA network
- b) Continuously assure shared understanding of quality practices in the ISSA network and on the local level
- c) Support members in developing a quality implementation strategy by using ISSA resources at local level
- d) Monitor the progress of implementing the QRP on the level of the ISSA network and at local level

All resources from the Quality Resource Pack (QRP) are to be found in the Library of the Online Community. The following resources are available in both English and Russian:

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

2.1. Develop leaflets on the Quality Resource Pack to advocate for quality

In October 2011, when the 2012 Work Plan was approved by the Council Members, a task force for developing the leaflets advocating for Quality was set up based on Council Members' expressed interest to be involved in such an activity. The task force included the following sub-groups:

- For the development of the leaflet targeting teachers:
 - o Open Academy Step by Step - Croatia
 - o Qendra Hap pas Hapi - Albania
 - o CEDP Step by Step - Romania
 - o Kosova Education Center - Kosovo
- For the development of the leaflet targeting parents:
 - o Open Academy Step by Step - Croatia
 - o CEDP Step by Step – Romania
- For the development of the leaflet targeting policy makers:
 - o Foundation for Education Initiatives Support - Kyrgyzstan
 - o Step by Step Czech Republic Foundation - Czech Republic
 - o Wide Open School Foundation - Slovakia
 - o Step by Step Educational Program - Moldova

The ISSA leaflets were planned as part of larger public awareness efforts regarding the quality of ECEC services and how ISSA Principles and the Quality Resource Packs can be used as guiding and meaningful resources for broader dialogue on quality issues. From the ISSA Secretariat, Zorica Trikić, Program Consultant, was assigned as coordinator of the activity of the three groups, which started the work by setting up three different Groups on the Online Community for smoother communication and focused discussions. Within the three online groups, members started sharing ideas and content related proposals. The coordination seemed to be difficult in terms of articulating a common agreed structure, as well as the development of the documents in the sections of the three online groups. Google doc was considered to be a better environment for co-construction of the drafts and also for working on the same document. Nevertheless, despite several attempts from the Secretariat to facilitate and push forward the work, not very much progress was made in the first half of the year.

Given this experience, the PD and the Program Consultants decided to come up with drafts for each of the leaflets (using ideas from the online discussions) and have members of the three groups build on them. In September 2012 Zorica Trikić and Dawn Tankersley worked on developing the first drafts of all three leaflets and the PD decided to present those versions to the Council Members during the October Meeting and to organize working group sessions for consulting members on the content of the leaflets. The main discussions were around language appropriateness, the length (amount of text), if the leaflets should be different for preschool and primary school audiences, and about the layout. Based on the consultations carried out in October, during the month of November and December the two program consultants worked on improving the content of the leaflets. By December 2012, the work was not finalized. It is anticipated that during the Program Committee Meeting will take place in February 2013, these drafts will be presented for endorsement to Program Committee members.

2.2. Develop articles focusing on ISSA Principles' implementation

The first drafts of two articles were finalized. A question came up, whether, for better articulation of the messages to be conveyed about ISSA's work around quality, there should be two articles or just one. The idea of possibly having only one article came up after being asked by John Bennett and SOFRECO to write a case study on ISSA's work around quality and evaluations of the impact of the Step by Step Program and ISSA's Standards/Principles. The case study, which will be part of a larger report commissioned by the European Commission, was developed by Dawn Tankersley and Sarah Klaus, OSF/ECP and ISSA's PD and ED contributed to its revision. The report was not yet released by the end of 2013.

2.3. ISSA/DECET/Open Academy Step by Step International Conference

Starting with January 2012, the ISSA-DECET-Open Academy Step by Step International Conference, which took place between 15-17 October, in Opatija/Croatia, became a high priority for both networks involved. A Conference Organizing Committee and a Conference Advisory Program Committee were set up in 2011, involving equally representatives from both networks. The Call for Applications launched in March indicated a high interest for the topic of the conference. The number of ISSA members' presentations was around 20 (including co-presentations with colleagues from other organizations). The participation reached 340 participants from 47 countries. The topic of the Conference was "Co-constructing Professional Learning – Pathways Towards Quality, Equity and Respect for Diversity in ECEC" and it was shaped around three conceptual strands:

1. Pathways for positioning the ECEC profession in increasingly challenging contexts
2. Systemic approaches to professional learning as a pathway to quality, equity, and respect for diversity
3. Pathways for co-constructing early childhood theory and practice - empowering learning communities

The key-note speakers who greatly contributed to the success of the event, were:

- Peter Moss, Emeritus professor of Early Childhood Provision, Institute of Education University of London - *Experimenters, Critical Thinkers and Democrats: The Role of Educators in a World of Conflicting Alternatives*
- Prof. Michel Vandenbroeck, Department of Social Welfare Studies, Ghent University, Belgium - *Moving beyond individual competences to competent systems in contexts of diversity and unpredictability*
- Edita Slunjski, Professor at the Department of Pedagogy of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb - *The learning community: overcoming the theory practice divide*

Both Committees worked very hard and the conference was a resounding success, especially in terms of showcasing ISSA as a strong and highly professional player in ECD in Europe and beyond and also as a convener for international events which provide meaningful professional development opportunities. The presentations of the key note speakers as well as the conference sessions were highly appreciated by the participants as they created:

- Space for discussions and exchange of ideas
- Space for reflection
- Space for partnerships
- Space for learning

The location also contributed to the success of the conference, as well as the way it was organized. In terms of the ISSA-DECET partnership, the communication and joint work passed through some glitches given the limited time and involvement of some of the DECET members. The work of the ISSA Secretariat was several times mentioned as being the key to the success of the Conference. The 2012 Conference was an important moment in bringing ISSA's work to the attention of all the organizations, partners and donors that attended the conference. ISSA members' contribution to the success of the conference through their presentations/sessions was mentioned several times by many participants. It was a wonderful opportunity to bring closer the East and West, South and North and to learn more about what ISSA and ISSA's members are doing in the CEE/CIS region. According to many participants' voices, the conference has been a reference professional event of the year 2012 and triggered their interest to participate in future ISSA international events. ISSA used the successful exposure during this event to extend an invitation to Conference participants to become members of ISSA, by disseminating the Join ISSA leaflet containing information about different levels of membership, criteria and procedure for joining. Conference presentations as well as photos were made available on the conference site after the event: <http://issa-decet2012.com.hr/followup.php>.

2.4. Finalize tools in the Quality Resource Pack

In the first half of the year, based on the work of the Program Committee at the end of 2011 and beginning of 2012, all methodological documents accompanying the Professional Development Tools and the Assessment Instrument were finalized and translated into Russian. The whole section of the Library of Resources developed by the ISSA Network – Goal II on the ISSA Online Community was re-organized for an easier search of resources. All resources were uploaded on the Online Library. An overview document introducing the ISSA Quality Resource Pack

was developed at the end of 2011 and, based on it, a poster-leaflet was produced in June 2012 with the purpose of marketing the comprehensive quality package. Copies of the poster-leaflet in English and Russian were disseminated to all ISSA members in October during the Annual Council Meeting.

2.5. Translation of the Online Course in Russian

The Online Course has concluded its piloting phase in May 2012. Based on the piloting results/evaluation, several adjustments for improving the course were made during 2012. After the course revision, the Russian translation began in October and it was finalized by the end of the year. In the beginning of the year the Russian version will be made available to members.

2.6. Develop new videos clips for maintaining reliability on the virtual platform

Given the experience from the previous year, when collecting videos from different member organizations has been challenging, in 2012 the PD, with the endorsement of the Program Committee, decided a new way of enriching the video library for the specific purpose of being used for reliability discussions. The Thematic Meeting in April in Leiden (see below 2.9), focused on enabling all participating members to produce videos with subtitles in English, being provided with professional licensed software (Power Director Deluxe). Twenty six members attended the workshop and by the end of the year each member was required to produce one video (preschool or primary school level) of 20 to 30 minutes, covering as many indicators as possible from the Assessment Instrument. The videos are to be used for checking reliability online. By December 2012, 7 members confirmed that they are working on finalizing the videos, some of them encountering various technical problems. Hunter Holliman, ISSA's consultant in developing the videos, was available throughout the process to provide assistance to any member working on the videos. The outcomes are far below the expectations: it depends on members' commitment and accountability for the investment made during the Thematic Meeting in April in Leiden.

2.7. Develop a structure on the Online Community for maintaining reliability

There was not enough time to allocate to this activity during 2012. Given the fact that the move towards the online environment to be used for maintaining reliability is expected to happen gradually until 2014, the success of this activity is very much depending on the success of the in-person Reliability Meetings which are to be conducted in 2012 and 2013, covering all members of ISSA. The plan is to set up the structure after most of these visits have taken place, and to pilot it with the Reliability Coordinators in 2013.

2.8. Build reliability on the local level using the Assessment Instrument

In the beginning of the year (end of January-beginning of February), a reliability meeting was organized in Chisinau-Moldova with all Reliability Coordinators (RCs). During the meeting, RCs discussed the tasks to be completed during 2012 and agreements were made on the countries for which each RC will be responsible. Each RC was provided with all documents necessary for conducting the reliability meetings:

- Guidelines for Conducting the Reliability Meetings
- Guidelines for Reporting on Reliability Meetings
- Professional Development Tools, Assessment Instrument and protocols, scoring sheets, scoring profiles
- Rater Reliability for Professional Development Tools
- Rater Reliability for Assessment Instrument

In order to make progress in working towards achieving the objective no. 2 of the QAIS - *Continuously assuring the shared understanding of quality practices in the ISSA network and at the local level*, for 2012 it was commonly agreed that each RC will conduct a local reliability meeting in their own country and a second one for another member in the network. In this way, it was envisaged that at least 20 countries will have initiated the process of creating new reliable experts on the local level, thus increasing the level of shared understanding of what quality means as it is defined by the ISSA resources. This highlights the importance of extending the reliability to more members in the network, thus making an easier rotation of RC members and adding to a stronger shared understanding of ISSA's concept of quality and of its resources.

Given the very busy time that all RCs' organizations experienced in the first half of the year, as well as the other organizations with which they had to commonly decide upon the dates when the Reliability Meeting should take place, only 2 meetings were conducted by June 2012 (Moldova, Hungary). All other meetings were postponed for September-December. In addition, two of the RC group experienced changes in their professional lives: Tahmina Rajabova is no longer working for OSF-Early Childhood Education Program in Tajikistan as she moved to Poland and Sanja Handzar is no longer working for Center for Educational Initiatives Step by Step in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Discussions were held to explore their availability to still conduct reliability meetings in 2012. By the end of 2012, the number of meetings conducted was below the expectations. Only 11 meetings were conducted:

1. Moldova – Cornelia Cincilei
2. Romania – Cornelia Cincilei
3. Latvia – Regina Sabaliauskiene
4. Belarus – Regina Rimkiene
5. Mongolia – Sanja Gena Handzar
6. Albania – Sanja Brajkovic
7. Croatia – Sanja Brajkovic
8. Kazakhstan – Tahmina Rajabova
9. Hungary – Dawn Trankersley
10. Kosovo – Mateja Rezek
11. Slovenia – Mateja Rezek

The data collected from the reports of the Reliability Coordinators indicate that the meetings were very successful and engaged members in in depth discussions around the quality of practices in preschools and primary schools, which was the overall goal of the meetings. This also provided a very good source for analyzing how these meetings were organized and for improving them during the discussions to be held in February 2013, when a new Reliability Meeting with all Reliability Coordinators will be organized. Here are the data collected from RC reports:

STRENGTHS:

Mongolia:

- Both Local Reliability Coordinators (LRCs) showed good observation skills and high understanding of quality defined by ISSA Principles and indicators and strong commitment toward improving quality. Both LRCs are fully capable of conducting the whole assessment process in accordance with ISSA protocol. High motivation of teachers to be certified with ISSA Principles.

Slovenia

- Willingness of all 3 LRCs to share understanding of quality and to participate in future observations.

Romania

- The discussion of the instrument, combined with the first exercise without recording the scores on the previous day, helped a lot for better shared understanding. Once it was agreed that we score only what we saw, it was easier to do it (although it did not exclude disagreements on some things related to the general practice). From the first to the second observations the level of consensus has increased.

Moldova

- From the first to the second observations the level of consensus has increased. Although there were 5 of us, the process went smoothly.

Kosovo:

- Team spirit, nobody was "prevailing", we were really trying hard to find positive examples in practice (as one member of the group said "The easiest way is to score all 0 if general impression is low")

Albania

- Participants appreciated the half day meeting with introduction of all materials which were used. Also, they appreciated and found very useful the second day of visit (first observation day) during which we were discussed about some concepts, overlapping indicators, etc.
- Participants appreciated the fact that in document there are 'notes' and 'clarifications' on indicators and what should be observed and what can be clarified during interview.

Croatia

- Participants found very useful the second day of visit (first observation day) during which we discussed about some concepts, overlapping indicators, etc.
- During the meeting we observed three very different teachers who were very challenging to score, which we think was very good for our discussions.
- Even if one of the LRCs did not 'achieve' the reliability with Reliability Coordinator, she found that discussions were very useful.

Kazakhstan

- Shared understanding of ISSA's Principles and Indicators established with Local Reliability Coordinators
- Discussions brought more clarity upon the quality indicators in the tools
- Explained Instruments and how each is to be used
- Explained the process of how reliability to the true score will be assessed in the Assessment Instrument in the process of using the PDT.
- Built a team of Local Reliability Coordinators who will work on shared understanding of quality within their own local networks including other pedagogues working in the school/center, teacher assistants, administrators, inspectors higher ed. faculty, etc.

WEAKNESSES:**Mongolia:**

- The third LRC didn't finish the process due to sudden other duties. Greater involvement in observations and discussions is needed in order to better distinguish examples and appropriate indicators.

Slovenia

- Only one person from practice (working in preschool) was involved in group
- Discussions were really taking a lot of time - 2 persons don't have much experience with observations (for one, it was the first time)

Romania

- The time limitation raises frustrations about the need to judge just what we managed to observe.

Moldova

- The time limitation raises frustrations about the need to judge just what we managed to observe; for this reason the new LRCs were sometimes scoring higher than the RC, based on inferences.

Kosovo:

- We were not so disciplined in time keeping, interviews lasted too long (we tried to fix this in the last observations, but then some members of the group had the feeling that they do not have enough information).

Croatia

- One of the participants previously used to be a Certifier with the previous ISSA Standards. Since she currently does not use the Principles in her work, it seems that the process of scoring started to be difficult for her.
- Participants proposed different scoring of Indicator 5.1.6. We think that scoring of that Indicator is very weak.

Kazakhstan

- There is no financial support on conducting reliability visit to places or to conduct mentoring.
- The Local Reliability Coordinators are new staff working on quality issues.
- Translation of instruments into local language
- External support for quality

THREATS/OBSTACLES:**Mongolia:**

- Lack of resources (human, time, money) for establishing a sustainable system of quality improvement and certification. Government doesn't yet fully recognize ISSA's certificate of quality.

Slovenia:

- How to reach primary schools - low interest from primary school staff to be involved in such group and no interest from primary school teachers to be observed

Romania

- The threats/obstacles are not so much related to the process of establishing inter-rater reliability, but rather to the possible over-simplification of the understanding of quality by evaluators themselves.

Moldova:

- The threats/obstacles are not so much related to the process (although to thoroughly evaluate a teacher a longer and repeated observation is needed), but for establishing inter-rater reliability it is ok. The practical problem is how to maintain this system.

Kosovo:

- The team found the instrument quite demanding and complicated, they will think how to use it in the practice (we discussed how we, in Slovenia, use it).

Croatia:

- The process of reliability discussions is very useful but there is threat that if more professionals are not included then it becomes less useful. Also, participants want to be clear what advantage is for them personally and for the ISSA member organization to have several professionals who are reliable.

Kazakhstan:

- Rotation of local authorities.
- Financial support for conducting mentoring and training on quality.

RECOMMENDATIONS:**Mongolia:**

- Include more LRCs in the process.
- Request from teachers to have Portfolio or other documentation ready and possibly available for LRCs before observation.
- Go to observation and have discussions among LRCs at least once per month.
- ISSA member organization, the Mongolian Education Alliance, should put stronger focus on quality improvement, rather than on the certification process.

Slovenia

- One of the LRCs recommended having 2 groups on local level, one for observing preschools and one for primary schools. For LRCs working in primary school it was difficult to observe in preschool.
- We are thinking about establishing another reliability group, to reach more people from practice; the only problem is time.
- Maybe the percentage of inter-rater reliability would be higher, if we observed 3 days in a row (without the time-gap in between, as we had now). The observations have to be done one day after the other.

Romania

- Practice more at country level and periodically have repeated international inter-reliability checks.

Moldova

- Practice more at country level and periodically have repeated international inter-reliability checks.

Kosovo

- More discussions (or even some kind of training) around how to interview teachers after observation. We found that it is better to ask open-ended question about focus areas and then check if the teacher responds about every indicator and only afterwards to ask specific questions. We all agreed that interviewing skills are very important.

Croatia

- We started to talk and think how to spread out the understanding of quality among Step by Step trainers, teachers and others who work in kindergartens and schools.

Kazakhstan

- To meet regularly with other local reliability coordinators and do exercises on using these instruments; minimum once per year to provide reliable meeting among Local Reliability Coordinators in the country.
- More than one coordinator for this country is needed because of large countryside, one main coordinator in the capital and 2-3 local regional level (within the country).
- To have the main local reliability coordinator continue to foster the close relationship to this group of reliable coordinators by providing on-going technical assistance. She might consider providing real observations using all these instruments towards improving the quality of practices.

- To provide practical work with coordinators in the field, by using these instruments; more practice
- To seek funding by writing project proposals on Quality Improvement and make plans for the improvement of the work of local mentors.

The extension of the group of reliable professionals in the network serves as a mechanism for expanding and assuring the shared understanding of ISSA Principles of Quality and of the accompanying tools for a proper use of the Quality Resources. Given that 2012 was the first year when the Reliability Meetings (having this profile of professional capacity investment and extension of shared understanding) were conducted, ISSA's PD was interested in collecting opinions from member organizations who hosted the meetings about the relevance of the process and how meaningful is it for their future work on quality. The feedback was highly positive and it was shared with all members on the ISSA Online Community in the News sections. The collected feedback confirms that this initiative offers great support to members by strengthening their capacity to work with ISSA's resources from the Quality Resource Pack.

Albania – Qendra Hap pas Hapi

Reliability Coordinator: Sanja Brajkovic

Gerda Sula: "It was a GREAT experience for us, and we are planning on doing it with other local mentors, as it provided SUCH a rich chance for authentic professional reflection. The process as such was much more useful than I thought it would be - the calibrating of viewpoints, even though the sentences are written in observable form, was most needed. I thought that three days just for the preschool were necessary - less than that wouldn't have made sense.

Kazakhstan – Step by Step Community Foundation

Reliability Coordinator: Tahmina Rajabova

Dina Aidzhanova: It is a very exciting process indeed - the teachers were very pleased, they accepted the assistance, they felt comfortable and safe, the atmosphere was friendly and busy; many discussions and clarifications, it is true professional development, indeed, judging by feedback from teachers. It is a very good idea! To be honest we should have started it a year earlier. Anyway it is helpful and useful now because of perfect instruments prepared by ISSA. They are very good and give impulse to go forward. I am glad that we didn't postpone the meeting and the work was fruitful.

Romania – Step by Step Center for Education and Professional Development

Reliability Coordinator: Cornelia Cincilei

Carmen Lica: It was a very good opportunity for us to reflect on the Professional Development Tool and ways to be used in the Step by Step network and its potential for a real improvement of the quality of practices in the classrooms, but also a very good opportunity for us as a professional organization to consolidate our position on the in-service training "market" in the country. It was useful for the range of questions/issues that were addressed:

- The way the observation was done
- The way the feedback was provided and the scoring was done
- The way the feedback was received
- The way that we have to train ourselves in using this tool

I think the instrument has a great potential for showcasing and documenting the strengths of the Step by Step approach and that its proper and clever use could make a difference in quality improvement. It was a challenge for us as a team in terms of all discussions we had, which showed a lot of passion for this field. Also, it helped us a lot in thinking what can be done in the next phase. That is how we launched a call for expression of interest for good practice/training centers in SbS-ECEC and recruitment of SbS trainers on quality. This is part of our broader strategy on quality in the next year.

Kosovo – Kosova Education Center

Reliability Coordinator: Mateja Rezek

Hana Zylfiu-Haziri: We had a wonderful week! I managed to organize visits in three completely different classrooms with teachers with very different experiences. We visited those that were included in Step by Step just

this year and we also visited the more experienced ones. This was very useful for us, as it gave us the opportunity to see teachers at different levels.

Belarus - Belorussian Parents' and Teachers' League Step by Step

Reliability Coordinator: Regina Rimkiene

Tamara Novosad: Our team is still under the impression of the meeting on quality maintenance and improvement. We are sincerely grateful to the whole group of authors of ISSA's Resource Pack on Quality Pedagogy, and the tools of professional development for improvement of the quality of practices. These are remarkable instruments for professional advancement both for teachers and for administrative personnel. The meeting became a real master class for all those who participated, and helped us comprehend the role of our organization in the use and adaptation of the Resource Pack as a training organization. There is no doubt that the merit goes to Regina Rimkiene. Her high professionalism, fine human qualities, good-will and attention to all participants in the process of establishing the reliability made our meeting exclusively useful, fruitful and positive.

2.9. Capacity Building Meeting on Documentation

As part of the objective no. 2 of the QAIS, the Thematic Meeting *Strengthening the Quality of Practices through Documentation* was organized in Leiden between April 23-25, 2013; 26 ISSA member NGOs were represented. The meeting was of high interest for ISSA members, some sending even two participants. Initially 28 members signed-up, but for unexpected reasons, two of them had to withdraw. The following objectives were in focus:

- Assure shared understanding of quality of ECD practices by updating members on the recent developments related to the ISSA Quality Resource Pack
- Strengthen ISSA members' capacity to use various means of documentation for improving the quality of practices in ECEC services
- Facilitate exchanges among members and external professionals on experiences related to tools and means of documentation.

The complete version of the Quality Resource Pack was presented, highlighting the most recent developments: the protocols, scoring sheets and scoring profile sheets for the Professional Development Tools and for the Assessment Instrument. A brief introduction to the latter ones was provided at the beginning of the meeting, thus contextualizing the topic and focus on Documentation in the framework of working with the resources in the QRP.

For enriching the members' expertise and competences in using different ways and means for using documentation in their work with practitioners, several guests were invited to share their advanced experience:

- Gloria Tognetti, Director, and Barbara Pagni, Training Coordinator - the Research and Documentation Centre on Childhood LA BOTTEGA DI GEPPETTO - San Miniato, Italy
- Hunter Holliman – Independent consultant - USA
- Jan Peters, Director and Caroline Boudry, Project Coordinator – the Research and Resource Centre for ECEC (VBJK), Department of Social Welfare Studies, University of Ghent – Ghent, Belgium

During the workshop, ISSA members were introduced to the long experience that La Bottega di Geppetto has in documentation (over 30 years), working with practitioners from services for children from birth to three and also to VBJK's experience in using videos and photos as means for documentation and professional development through guided discussions and group reflections. Half of the meeting was a workshop on learning how to produce a video with subtitling by using the Power Director 10 software, the license for which was purchased by ISSA Secretariat and distributed to all participating members prior to the meeting. The workshop was held by Hunter Holliman, who has been the resource person in developing the ISSA Video Library over the past years. This workshop was intended as a long term investment in members' capacity to produce themselves videos which can be used in their professional development activities focusing on quality with practitioners, as well as for advocacy reasons. Having the license for the program and getting the knowledge how to use it would enable those participating to the meeting to transfer it to other colleagues in their organizations and start producing high quality products. The development of videos was contextualized in the QAIS framework and the need for enriching the ISSA Video Library with videos for reliability purposes. Therefore, each ISSA member NGO participating to the

meeting was required to produce a video by the end of the year. According to the evaluations of the meeting, the content and structure were highly appreciated and the meeting was assessed as effective in terms of expected outcomes. Most of the participants felt confident in using the Power Director 10 program, while some recognized that they need more practicing. It was challenging to have a technical workshop in two languages with participants with different IT skills. In future meetings, clustering might need to be considered.

As a positive “side effect” of the meeting, the partners from The Research and Documentation Center in San Miniato became very interested in ISSA’s Conference and in general ISSA’s work. They participated with a presentation in the conference and offered for distribution just for ISSA members of one of their very recent publications, produced in collaboration with the Innocenti Institute and the University of Florence: *The Tuscan Approach to Early Childhood and Education*. Also towards the end of the year they approached ISSA, as the Director of the Research and Documentation Center in San Miniato is also the Education Coordinator in the Istituto degli Innocenti in Florence, to become partners in a Leonardo da Vinci – Transfer of Innovation proposal for 2013. ISSA and three member organizations joined this consortium putting together the proposal.

2.10. Maintaining reliability among the Reliability Coordinators

Since in 2011 there was no meeting organized for checking if the inter-rater reliability is still maintained above 85%, in 2012 such a meeting was organized at the beginning of the year, thus setting the stage for the plan around extending reliability in the network during 2012. The meeting was held for four days in February, in Chisinau-Moldova and all Reliability Coordinators were present. The meeting had three major objectives:

- Maintaining the reliability among RC using the Assessment Instrument at min. 85%
- Planning the reliability meetings in 18 countries: objectives, duration, outcomes.
- Planning the extended research on the Assessment Instrument

Agenda and the documents needed for the meeting were developed in coordination with Cornelia Cincilei, the Executive Director of Step by Step Educational Program Moldova, the hosting organization, and everything was provided to RCs in advance. The results of the meeting indicated that reliability is still maintained at 85%, even above among some of the RCs. The discussions in the groups were very inspiring leading to small changes in the examples provided for the indicators in the Assessment Instrument as well as on clarifications in the Scoring Sheet on how to score specific indicators. The main objective was to assure a more accurate way of scoring indicators based on the experience RCs had when discussing the differences in their scorings. As mentioned in section 2.7 above, during this meeting, the RCs agreed among themselves how to divide the ISSA member NGOs considering the language proficiency and geographical proximity. All RCs agreed that such meeting is an authentic professional development activity given the deep analysis of practices and the inquiring exercise of concepts existing in the indicators. An important point of the meeting was to plan the work around the extended research on putting the Principles in practice, continuing on the research developed during 2010-2011. More information regarding the progress for the extended research will be presented in section 2.16.

2.11. Online Course for Kindergarten Teachers

The Online Course has finalized its piloting phase in both languages English and Slovak in May 2012 and according to the formative and also summative evaluations the course has been a very exciting and successful experience from which everybody learned a great deal – both participants and the course moderators (Dawn Tankersley and Eva Koncokova). The course grew into a vibrant professional community where exchanges of views and learning from each other via the course online platform enriched each participant’s knowledge and experience, even if different levels of experience were indicated. Among the things which participants seemed to value most are:

- The opportunity for self-study and for applying in practice some of the new things learnt, with the opportunity to come back online to self-reflect, share with others about the experience, and get feedback from the moderator and the other course participants
- The discussion forums, which were moderated by the course moderators, were highly valued by all participants, and were very dynamic and interactive. Participants shared from their own teaching experience, provided information on useful links and websites, commented on each other’s ideas etc. This

aspect of the course – being part of an online learning community – makes this professional development opportunity a much more powerful experience than a traditional training, or self-study.

- Several participants provided positive feedback especially on the innovative approaches in the modules on Play/Democracy and on Interactions.
- The role of moderators was much appreciated, and participants gave positive feedback on how the two moderators guided their work.
- The international aspect of the course was also a big plus for the English speaking group, allowing participants to gain insights into how universally valid principles of quality pedagogy are being translated into practice in contexts which are diverse in almost every way. The fact that participants were able to share photos and video clips of their classrooms was much appreciated.

Building on the successful pilot, ISSA was able to negotiate a new partnership with IBM's Global Work/Life Fund for providing the course to two new cohorts of practitioners from all over the world. Beginning with spring of 2013, ISSA will offer a revised version in English for English speakers and the translated version in Spanish for Spanish speakers. In selecting practitioners for the course, while priority will be given to educators teaching in centers affiliated with IBM – where IBM employees enroll their children, or centers financed by IBM programs - there will be seats for practitioners coming from other centers as well. In the summer and autumn of 2012, ISSA's Program Specialist and course moderator Dawn Tankersley worked on the revision of the modules taking into account the feedback collected during the piloting phase and the requirements for developing a structure compatible to receiving credits during an accreditation process for an in-service training course. Several new features were added to the course in the process of revision, including a Portfolio for course participants. The process of uploading the course took longer than estimated due to the low capacity of ISSA's current IT service provider to work with Joomla and with platforms for Portfolios. ISSA had to contract other consultants to provide this service. The next cohorts of course participants are to be recruited in January-February 2013 and the course will begin in March 2013. The Spanish course will be moderated in partnership with the Fundacion Leer in Argentina, who recently joined ISSA as an affiliate member. Once revision and uploading of the English version will be completed, the course materials will be made available to ISSA members. During 2013, ISSA will continue to explore partnerships with universities so that the course may be offered for credit in the future.

2.12. Technical Assistance offered to members on issues of Quality

In 2012, the Technical Assistance offered to members focused exclusively on supporting their work around quality as they put to use the resources in the QRP. The call for applications was launched at the end of January and by the end of February the following applications were received:

- *Mongolian Education Alliance (MEA)* – Mongolia: the application focused on providing ToT for new trainers from different regions from Mongolia given that a new policy regarding teacher professional development was approved. There is a growing demand for high professional trainers and the MEA expertise is already recognized in the field. Still the problem they encounter is that many of the trainers were trained back in 1998, and now either they retired, or they are going to retire, or they left the system. There is a need for reinforcing the pool of trainers. The training was for 30 new trainers who already had an initial training in child-centered methodology. MEA asked for ISSA's technical assistance in providing an expert trainer.
- *Early Childhood Development Program – OSI Tajikistan*: the application focused on providing 2 trainings with representatives of teacher training institutions on Step by Step methodology with the purpose of influencing the pre-service and in-service training system towards promoting a child centered approach in ECEC. The envisaged final outcome was to develop child centered courses for teachers with teacher training institutes. ECD Program OSI Tajikistan has made great advocacy efforts in promoting child centered methodology among teacher training institutions (a roundtable was organized last year also with ISSA support), which led to directors of training institutes expressing interest to attend such trainings.
- *Step by Step Czech Republic*: the application focused on two major objectives: 1. to carry out an evaluation (quality mapping) based on the ISSA Quality Principles of 5 Step by Step kindergartens and 5 Step by Step primary school with the purpose of identifying high quality provisions as flagships for the 5

regions in Czech Republic; and 2. to support the creation of learning communities in those 10 centers through a 2 days training.

During March 2012 the Program Committee reviewed the applications; given the limited budget available and the high amounts requested by all three applications, only two out of the three were approved, both of them with concrete recommendations and selected items in the budget approved to be funded by ISSA. The two applications approved were the ones from MEA-Mongolia and ECD Program OSI Tajikistan. In June, due to the fact that Tahmina Rajabova who submitted the application for ECD Program OSI Tajikistan, was no longer staff of the program, the ISSA ED and PD contacted Jamshed Kurbanov (who took Tahmina's position) and discussed about the application submitted in February. The conclusion was that the request for Technical Assistance should be postponed until autumn or later, when the ECD Program will decide whether it is still feasible and needed for 2012. No further actions were taken in 2012, and the activity was postponed for 2013, given OSI-ECD Program's decision to approach more strategically the capacity building on quality in Tajikistan.

The **MEA's Technical Assistance application** requested the expertise of Sanja Handzar for conducting the training of trainers in Mongolia. Although Sanja Handzar left CIE SbS Bosnia and Herzegovina, given her commitment to provide assistance to MEA Mongolia, a 4-day training of trainers was organized by MEA, between November 3-6. The training included a combination of conceptual and practical work in which all participants were actively engaged in discussing and practicing main Adult Learning principles, developing workshop plans, exercising facilitation skills, reflecting and evaluating training for adults. The training itself was designed to model good practice of all important elements of a successful training such as: creating safe and stimulating environment, respecting diversity, active learning methods, opportunities for sharing in small groups, appropriate ice-breakers and energizers with the aim to introduce a topic, connect participants, create positive energy in the group, meaningful usage of visual and other aids, different ways of grouping, daily reflection, flexibility and balanced focus on group processes, relationships among participants and achieving the results of the training. The materials used were based on:

- The Step by Step ToT developed by International Consultant Barbara Wolfe
- The Facilitators' Training Manual, Education for Social Justice: A Program for Adults, by Jacquelyn Valerie Reza, Ed.D., MFCC
- The Manual: "Interaktivna obuka", developed by CIP Serbia.

The 34 participants were mostly teachers (preschool and primary) with very little experience in organizing and facilitating training for adults. Thus, MEA is intending to continue working with this group of trainers and providing them with extensive trainings and follow-up activities in terms of raising their teacher competences as well as trainer competences.

As highlighted in the report from ISSA's consultant, "participants showed great motivation and readiness to learn and improve (worked longer hours than planned), sincere openness to give feedback, and dedication toward MEA's mission. Each participant was taking copious notes during the whole training. On average 20 pages of notes (irrespective whether a handout was delivered) shows the eagerness and responsibility of chosen participants to fully use the opportunity they were offered. During the whole training participants were supporting each other and worked in assigned teams or small groups in respectful manner. During the participants' practical exercise (20-30 minutes) all teams showed significant potential in trainer skills and attitude of powerful leaders of change. The MEA team organized the whole event in a highly professional manner concerning all details, from lodging, meals, training material, administrative work, to effective communication with the trainer, enhancing the positive and productive atmosphere in the group, creating networks among participants and tangible contribution during the discussions".

Based on the Technical Assistance activity, the consultant provided the following recommendations:

- MEA should organize next advanced training of trainers (soon) and divide participants in two groups.
- The next training should be organized around tangible content areas (e.g. ISSA Principles) and not focus solely on trainers' skills.

- Follow-up activities should focus on real opportunities for trainers to implement what they have learned, receive feedback from an observer and become reflective professionals.

Only one application was approved for providing Technical Assistance in 2012. However, the Program Committee considered that some activities from the Member Exchange application from the **Center for Innovations in Education (CIE) Azerbaijan**, which was approved from among ME applications, had a Technical Assistance aspect. Therefore, Daiga Zaike from Center for Education Initiatives (CEI) Latvia was invited as a consultant for CIE on topics related to inclusive education – education for children with special needs. The activity took place on July 1-5, and focused on:

- Sharing best practices on how to develop and support inclusive education at school level based on the experience of Latvian schools partnering with CEI.
- Providing advice on models of social partnership for inclusion at local communities' level – schools, parents, local authorities, social workers and local NGOs.

A seminar entitled “Inclusive school climate for education researchers and school managers; the philosophy of inclusive education - the Latvian experience” was organized at the National Institute of Education Research. Two workshops were held: one in Baku and one in the region Sheki: the first one on “Inclusive School Climate – The Latvian experience of implementing inclusive education: achievements and challenges”, and the second one on “Inclusive education as a part of the Effective School model”. In addition, several other professional meetings and individual consultations were facilitated by CIE Azerbaijan.

The Technical Assistance activity relied on the fact that:

- since 2005 CIE Azerbaijan began to pilot the Inclusive Education expertise at classroom level in mainstream school together with the implementation of the Step by Step Program,
- their efforts to promote Inclusive Education continued in the Project on Effective School Model Development funded by MOE and local office of WB in 2011,
- in the national project CIE is developing a package on effective school model as a learning organization in 11 schools throughout the country and those schools will be the first educational settings where school accreditation procedures are piloted with CIE assistance,
- CIE was proposed to consider the inclusive school climate as one of the indicators for planned school accreditation process and during the summer 2012, teachers and school principals, parents from pilot schools were involved in the development of the school's strategic plan that includes measurements based on inclusive school climate concept. School teams have limited knowledge on international experience and practices on how inclusiveness is applied as part of whole school culture.

The Latvian Consultant's experience and expertise was useful for assisting CIE in providing an international expertise on inclusive education and also an example of how another system from a different country is implementing inclusive education policies. Also the support provided to CIE was meant to contribute to CIE's endeavors to meaningfully and professionally influence the education system towards inclusiveness and equity.

2.13. Minimum requirements for ISSA Full Members for promoting and working with ISSA Quality Principles

During the Program Committee in February 2012, there have been discussions around the minimum requirements for ISSA members to align their work with and promote the ISSA Principles and a first draft was sent for further discussions with the Task Force on Membership issues and with the Board. The requirements, which were further fine-tuned, were included in the documents referring to ISSA membership, which were run among Council Members through regional consultations coordinated by the Regional Anchors and Thematic Meetings during the months of April-June, and later voted via electronic vote. Thus, ISSA Full Members are expected to meet the following requirements related to professional capacity:

- Professional staff and ability to deliver on their mission
- High quality professional expertise and reputation

- Program/advocacy work that addresses pressing ECD issues in the country
- Focus on ongoing professional development and self-assessment
- Actively taking advantage of ISSA services and engaging in ISSA's professional life
- Committed to the ISSA Principles and take every opportunity to apply them in the NGO's work
- Active in professional dialogue, exchange of experience and sharing of good practices in their own country and in the network.

During the October 2012 Council Meeting the issue of professional capacity was discussed, more specifically the fact that the NGOs face a challenge in terms human resources (lack of, changes, capacity). It was concluded that, in order to strengthen their human resources (staff and network of trainers/mentors), the NGOs could make use of the visits of the Reliability Coordinators, and also apply for technical assistance or member exchanges from ISSA.

2.14. Introduce to NGOs a framework for an NGO Portfolio on work around Quality

The work around the development of the online portfolio is still in progress. Several technical options were analyzed (e.g. the Mahara platform, Google creator and other tools) in conjunction with the revision of the online course, which also will include an online portfolio. Finally, from among all options explored, ISSA chose WordPress. The work on the development of the Portfolio relied very much on technical support from ISSA's IT service provider. This gradually indicated to be a critical problem and slowed down the process of developing the portfolio. During the Council Meeting a working group was set up in parallel with those working on the ISSA leaflets to advocate for quality. The group was introduced with the envisaged structure of the portfolio and was consulted around the structure's relevance, comprehensiveness, clarity and meaningfulness for the members. Sanja Brajkovic assisted ISSA's PD and Program Consultant (Zorica Trikić) in the development of a google.com site to illustrate how the portfolio could look like. The feedback from the group was very useful in reshaping the structure of the portfolio and for making it simpler and more meaningful for members. By the end of 2012, the new ISSA IT consultant was still working on developing the online platform in line with ISSA's PD requirements. It is estimated that by the end of January the testing version of the platform will be ready so that it may be shared with the Program Committee for feedback, during the February Program Committee Meeting.

2.15. Assisting ISSA member NGOs in building their Portfolio on work around implementation of QRP

This activity is planned as a continuous one for 2013-2014. In 2012 the plan was to develop the structure on the ISSA Online Community and to introduce it to the ISSA member NGOs, have consultations on how it can be improved so that it is most relevant, and then assist the ISSA members in uploading meaningful documents. Consultations were run only around the structure of the Portfolio during the Council Meeting with a group of ISSA members. When the testing version of the platform will be finalized, several members will be asked to pilot it and improvements will be made before sharing it with all ISSA members. During 2013, assistance will be provided to members to upload information/documents in the online portfolio under their organization's page.

2.16. Extend research on implementation of ISSA Principles

The extended research was envisaged to be conducted in 2012 on an additional sample of 116 observations from at least 15 countries relying on the expertise of the Reliability Coordinators. A more in depth analysis of the report from last year led to the conclusion that for a factorial analysis, which would provide more extensive data, a sample of at least 300 observations will be needed. In 2011, data from 114 observations were collected and in 2012 it was expected to have at least from an additional 110, which would still be under the requested number. Until the end of the year, 106 observations were conducted and all data collected. An analysis of the sample will be run in the beginning of 2013 to assess the balance of all variables in the sample. During the Reliability Meeting in February, all Reliability Coordinators will be encouraged to do the observations in places that will contribute to reaching a representative sample. It is estimated that the additional observations will be finalized by summer 2013, and in October 2013 a report will be available.

2.17. Piloting the use of the Assessment Instrument (AI)

This activity is strictly depending on two important variables:

- It has to be piloted by one of the organizations to which the Reliability Coordinators belong, since the reliability is a key-issue in the piloting phase.
- It has to be piloted on a project that is in the inception phase so that we can pilot it as a pre-and post-assessment tool.

These two pre-conditions made it difficult to find the right context for piloting it. In February the PD and the Program Committee explored the possibility to pilot it within a project of the Center for Educational Initiatives Bosnia and Herzegovina – a project focusing on developing professional learning communities. Discussions have been advanced with Sanja Handzar, one of the Reliability Coordinators. Unfortunately, Sanja Handzar left CEI and this made it no longer possible to go ahead with the plans. There have been discussions among ISSA and OSF/ECP Program regarding the scoring scale and the total scoring of the Assessment Instrument which might have impact on the piloting phase. Given the high number of activities to be finalized by the end of 2012, progress on this activity was very slow. It is envisaged to continue discussions with OSF/ECP and look for a consultant to develop a scoring methodology that will lead to a total score as a result of using the AI as an assessment instrument in a classroom. Work on this activity will continue in 2013.

Funders/Partners for initiatives in the sections above: OSF and IBM (for the Online Course)

2.18. Other Meetings/Partnership Initiatives Related to Goal II

Participation in International Meetings and Initiatives

The ED and the PD attended the Global Partnership for Education GPE/UNICEF High level Technical Workshop on ECD Quality in Athens, between 4-6 June. ISSA was also represented by ISSA members from: Moldova, Tajikistan, Serbia, Romania, Kyrgyzstan and Macedonia. The PD presented on ISSA's experience and expertise in ECD in the CEE/CIS region and particularly on advocating and building capacity for improving quality of ECEC services through its extended Quality Resource Pack, building on the Step by Step experience. The ED presented on ISSA's experience in networking and supporting learning communities, and invited GPE teams to consider using ISSA's services. During the event, the PD and ED had individual discussions with the GPE teams (Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Moldova, Tajikistan) for exploring ways in which ISSA members may be involved in future plans of country teams for GPE proposals. The event was considered a very good opportunity for positioning ISSA in the CEE/CIS region as a key international ECD organization and important partner for UNICEF, WB and other key stakeholders.

ISSA's ED and PD were invited to attend in Brussels on June 26 the meeting of the European Commission's Group of Stakeholder Organisations working in related fields of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and Early School Leaving (ESL). The meeting was a good opportunity to make ISSA more visible on the European level and to influence the work the EC is undertaking for the next two years through their Thematic Working Groups. The meeting was attended by important current and potential new partners for ISSA: OSF, UNICEF, BvLF, UNESCO, and several European foundations and agencies.

2.19. Consultancy

Within an EU-UNICEF-funded project, *Strengthening Preschool Education*, UNICEF Turkey contracted the ISSA Program Director, via ACEV, to provide consultancy to the Ministry of Education for the development of quality standards in the Turkish preschool education system. The PD's contribution was highly appreciated by the national consultants' team and representatives of UNICEF Office Turkey. The contract lasted from January to July 2012.

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

Overview of Progress under Goal III

The work under this goal focuses in 2012 primarily on capacity building in the network to implement Parenting Programs.

Objectives:

- *bring into the network new approaches and resources (from ACEV)*
- *build capacity among ISSA members to directly improve the lives of children by supporting their parents.*

3.1. Parenting Programs Targeting Fathers – capacity building in the network

During the October 2011 Meetings, a meeting was organized with OSF, representatives of ACEV and interested ISSA members to discuss plans for moving forward with the Fathers Support Program initiative during 2012. A 5-day training on ACEV's Fathers Support Program, as a Thematic Meeting, was included in ISSA's 2012 Work Plan and it was organized between 19-23 March 2012 in Istanbul. The ISSA member NGOs who were interested to implement the ACEV's Father Support Program (FSP) were invited to attend the training to get familiar with the content and methodology of the programs, as well as to be introduced to ACEV's protocols for becoming an implementer of their program. Based on their commitment for implementation through partnership with ACEV, 27 ISSA member NGOs reps benefitted from the training program. A major challenge of the training was the fact that the English version of the Training Manual was not ready for dissemination, thus making it difficult to comprehensively understand the training program. Another challenge was the fact that the trainees were experienced trainers who would have needed deeper understanding of the content and how the methodology serves best the transfer of knowledge and skills to fathers. Nevertheless, during the training many of the content and methodological issues were discussed with ACEV representatives, who were very open to these discussions, and the design of the training was adjusted to the needs of the trainees. In addition, participants learnt about ACEV's policy for licensing other organizations to implement the FSP program; a template for an MOU was shared. ACEV expressed interest in partnering with ISSA members as leader of a consortium, and shared with ISSA member organizations potential funding sources, like the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA). After the training, ACEV committed itself to finalize the English version of the FSP Training Manual which would make it easier for ISSA members to plan potential implementation, considering necessary adaptations and changes in the content, so that it would best serve the local needs. Although it was expected that the Training Manual will be translated by the end of May, ACEV has not succeeded that unfortunately. Thus the planning for FSP implementation has been delayed. Nevertheless, a Special Interest Group for further discussions, sharing and planning future partnerships was set up by Ec Pec, ISSA's Hungarian member organization, on the ISSA Online Community. Interested NGOs were invited to join, so that they may use this tool for planning future implementation. After consultations with ACEV, some ISSA members contacted TIKA offices in their countries (e. g. NGOs in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Ukraine) and began exploring the development of a project proposal. Once the English version is available, the ISSA Secretariat will explore ways to translate it into Russian, so that both versions can be made available to members.

Although further discussions were pursued in autumn of 2012 regarding the stage of development of the translated modules, by the end of 2012 ACEV did not provide yet a final version of the Fathers' Support Program - Training Manual in English.

Partner/Funder: OSF through the General Support Grant, ACEV Turkey

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

Overview of Progress under Goal IV

During 2012, progress under this goal included:

- Smooth functioning of the Program Committee, Regional Anchors and other ISSA Bodies under the new fine-tuned organizational framework, which led to more meaningful and dynamic member engagement
- Finalizing documents for a new Membership Framework, which, after consultations, were approved by the Council through an electronic vote
- Successfully running the OSF/ISSA Data Survey and a Membership Survey to inform strategic planning
- Further steps in changing the organizational culture and increasing capacity to effectively use an online tool for collaboration, knowledge management and distance learning
- Preparing the ground for enlarging the membership and expanding ISSA's reach
- First steps in accepting new ISSA members

Objectives:

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

4.1. Membership Issues

4.1.1. New Membership Framework

During the first half of the year, a Membership Task Force, which was set up during the October 2011 Council Meeting, has worked hard to finalize a set of documents outlining ISSA's new Membership Framework, including rights and responsibilities, rules of conduct in the network, an overview chart of all the stakeholders in the expanding ISSA network etc. The documents were approved by the Board and, with help from the legal counsel revisions were made in the *Internal Regulations* to align them with the new membership framework. In addition to the revisions in the Internal Regulations, three documents were prepared as annexes: *Membership Information Sheet*, *Friends of ISSA* and *Overview Chart - Who is Who in the ISSA Network* (see Annexes I-IV). The Regional Anchors carried out skype consultations with the members in their sub-regions. Discussions were also organized during the two Thematic Meetings, as well as during other gatherings where clusters of members were present. An electronic vote was carried out at the end of June, when the documents were adopted by a large majority. Discussions around the documents continued during the October 2012 Council Meeting to make sure that there is shared understanding on the new membership framework. This represents an important moment in ISSA's history, when ISSA is poised to expand its membership and serve more widely as a clearing house for ECD in the CEE/CIS region. The new framework is also important because it brings clarity on several issues which have been cause for some tensions in the network in previous years and for anxiety with regards to potential new members – for instance the issue of competition in the network and rights to ISSA's intellectual property.

In addition to the membership framework documents presented to the Council for voting, the Secretariat and the ISSA Board worked on developing a new *Membership Application Form* and a template for a *Letter of Commitment*, to be signed by new members (see Annexes V-VI). A *Join ISSA* Leaflet was also developed and disseminated among Conference participants in October 2012 - <http://www.issa.nl/join.html>.

As soon as the vote was finalized and the new membership framework was adopted, following the recently agreed procedures, with input from the Program Committee, an invitation was sent to two organizations which have been waiting for several years to join ISSA as members: the Comenius Foundation in Poland and ACEV in Turkey. They

both responded with enthusiasm and prepared application forms, which were approved by the ISSA Board and the decision was ratified by the Council in October during the Council Meeting. The two new full members soon became engaged in the ISSA network – an ACEV representative attended the Council Meeting, while Comenius Foundation sent a proxy. By early 2013, altogether ISSA welcomed 3 new full members and 4 new affiliate members. As an immediate service, their staff members were invited to join the ISSA Online Community, so that they may benefit from news and resources shared there, and from exchanges with other ISSA members.

4.1.2. Regional Anchors

During the 2011 Council Meeting, ISSA members agreed on the following Regional Anchors for 2012:

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

In January-February, the ED and the Network Manager worked with the Regional Anchors (RAs) to agree on a plan for their work throughout the year, which was summarized in a document: *Tasks for Regional Anchors in 2012*, and shared with all ISSA members (see Annex VII).

During the year, RAs focused on assisting members to more actively use the Online Community as a tool for communication, information exchange and collaboration. They also posted news on this intranet from their own NGOs in the News from Members section. Another important task was to conduct skype and email consultations with members on the membership framework documents. The Regional Anchor for the Central Asia/Mongolia/Azerbaijan region worked with the Secretariat and carried out consultations with members to agree on the location for the September Board Meeting, and on plans for other visits of the ED and the PD to Central Asian countries. The Board Meeting was organized in early September in Kyrgyzstan, and in addition the PD, the ED and two board members also visited Kazakhstan. Professional development and advocacy events were organized in both countries around the visits.

Within the recently fine-tuned organizational framework, the key roles of the RAs revolve around:

1. Contributing to **network building** in their sub-region and to strengthening ISSA as a learning community cross-regionally;
2. Representing **the interests of members** in sub-region on membership issues, in the implementation of ISSA's Annual Work Plan and in development of multi-year strategy and yearly work plans;
3. Helping with **communication** with and among members and with the different ISSA bodies.

Despite the efforts made to clarify and consolidate the role of Regional Anchors, which in this format is relatively new in the ISSA network, the ISSA Review Report commissioned by OSF revealed that there is still not enough clarity and shared understanding among members with regards to this. Further efforts are needed and discussions were organized in the strategic planning process and during the October 2012 meetings, with the different ISSA Bodies, including the RAs themselves.

During the regional meetings and in plenary discussions, the Council reviewed again the tasks of Regional Anchors, in order to ensure that there is common understanding regarding their role:

- Communication
- Collaboration
- Ambassador – representing interests of members in ISSA processes
- Mentor new staff of NGOs and new ISSA members

The Council also decided to extend the term of a Regional Anchor to two years, in order to allow for more continuity. When appointing a Regional Anchor, a person is appointed from that organization, and the task should not be transferred to other staff members of the NGO. Members also decided to explore in the future organizing a Regional Meeting before the Council Meeting, the organization of which will be coordinated by the RA.

4.1.3. Member Exchanges

The call for application for Member Exchange activities was launched at the end of January and by the end of February the following applications were received:

- *Foundation Education Initiatives Support – Kyrgyzstan*: the application focused on organizing a roundtable on implementation of quality pedagogy in Kyrgyzstan where representatives of Ministry of Education, universities, kindergartens and schools will participate.
- *Center for Educational Initiatives Step by Step – Bosnia and Herzegovina*: the application is focused on supporting the member exchanges between Balkan countries during the annual Regional Conference CEI has been organizing in the last three years. The topic of the conference this year is *Social Cohesion* - empowering practitioners, civil society and families to take action in building social cohesion through various means of action, thus providing an inclusive environment for young children and their families, especially those coming from vulnerable groups. Representatives of 5 ISSA member NGOs will participate.
- *Center for Innovations in Education – Azerbaijan*: the application focused on exchanging experiences between Azerbaijan and Latvia in the field of inclusive education, given that CIE plays at the moment an important role in its country in the Project of Effective School Models, funded by Ministry of Education and the World Bank, within which will develop a package on effective school models as a learning organization where inclusiveness will be an important dimension.

After reviewing them, the Program Committee approved all three applications, with some adjustments in the items to be funded, given ISSA's limited budget for Member Exchanges activities.

Foundation Education Initiatives Support – Kyrgyzstan: Based on the feedback from the ISSA Member Survey ran in April 2012 regarding the request for stronger support to Central Asian members, the ISSA ED and PD, together with the Board, proposed to organize the Board Meeting in September in one of the Central Asian countries. Thus, after consultations with members in the region via the Regional Anchor, it was decided to link the Member Exchange activity in Kyrgyzstan with the Board Meeting. Thus it was envisaged that ISSA can play a more supportive role to FEIS and their plans to push forward the ECD agenda in Kyrgyzstan and Board members (especially representatives on the Board coming from Council members) could have an active role in the advocacy roundtable planned by FEIS. Two events were organized during the Board visit in Kyrgyzstan:

- Workshop with FEIS mentors/trainers working with professionals in ECEC services. All ISSA Board members participated to group discussions during the workshop and presented their conclusions at the end of the day. The participation of ISSA Board members was highly appreciated by the participants.
- Roundtable on Quality of ECEC services in Kyrgyzstan with representatives of the Ministry of Education, regional authorities, universities and teacher training institutions and other NGOs active in education. ISSA Board members contributed with interventions showcasing ISSA's focus on quality in ECEC services. The PD introduced the Quality Principles and the resources available in the Quality Resource Pack. The main objective of ISSA's participation in the roundtable was to draw the attention on the expertise that is available in FEIS as a valuable partner for the Ministry of Education in the new Global Partnership for Education project focusing on improving the quality of preschool education. Feedback from FEIS was positive with regards to meeting this objective.

Center for Educational Initiatives Step by Step – Bosnia and Herzegovina: The regional conference organized by CEI this year was supported by ISSA given its mission of promote principles of equity and diversity and also as a way of supporting the advocacy campaign on education for social justice which was part of the conference. Given that ISSA supported the participation of 5 other ISSA members also in 2011, in 2012 the funds provided were lower than in the previous year, facilitating again the participation of the neighboring members to take part in the event.

Center for Innovations in Education – Azerbaijan: The Member Exchange activity consisting in a study visit of an Azeri team to CEI Latvia was conducted after Daiga Zaike from CEI Latvia provided the Technical Assistance to CIE Azerbaijan on issues of inclusive education based on the Latvian experience. During the visit, the Azeri team had:

- Meeting with the mayor of Jekbappils Leonids Salcevis and Support Centers for Support of Inclusive Education (SCSIE) team members. Discussed topics: How inclusive education is supported by local authorities, how municipalities are involved in promotion of inclusive education through SCSIE in the region. Role and functions of SCSIE in service provision for children with special needs and their families, responsibilities and duties of SCSIE staff – diagnosis, rehabilitation work, work with schools and families. Main features of 12 support programs provided by SCSIE
- Meeting with the members of School Council and Parent Association. Discussed issues: How Parents are involved in decision making process in the school? How parents could impact equal quality education to all children at school? Parents shared their vision on equal education opportunities for school children related the best practices applied: parents as active contributors to Education law design, tracking system on children moving from one school to another to prevent drop, joint work with school team on four years school strategy plan, information campaign on active parents' involvements in education, design and delivery of training program for parents (CEI and Parent Association)
- Visits to three primary and secondary schools for observing and comparing diversity of approaches in supporting inclusiveness in rural and urban schools. The importance of community support in integration of children with special needs to mainstream school in small settlement, how team of psychologist, speech therapist and social pedagogue support children with special needs in mainstream school, Individual Education plan development and implementation, role of school principal in team building and inclusive climate support, school strategy development cycle.
- Visit to University of Latvia for discussions around the project "Development and Implementation of The Support System for Youth at Risk on the Social Exclusion"
- Visit to National Center for Education and meeting the manager of the project "Development and Implementation of The Support system for Youth at Risk on the Social Exclusion. Main topics discussed were following: Latvian education policy contexts and how inclusive education principles were reflected and advocated in the last decade. What changes were achieved in Education law to support integration of children with disabilities into mainstream school? Role of special schools, choice of parents, IE resource centers as advising agency, assessment of children with disabilities provided at three levels –school, municipality and state pedagogy medical commission

In terms of follow-up activities for this Member Exchange activity, CIE Azerbaijan planned the following activities:

- *On the school level:*
 - o The school representatives will run the seminar on main outcomes of ME visit for teachers, school administration and parents in pilot schools in Sumgait, Lenkoran, Shirvan and Guba (October- November)
 - o Seminar with participation of Education NGOs, IE experts and IE schools on Inclusive education developments and highlights: Latvian case – 2nd November at the CIE office
- *On policy level:*
 - o Observed and analyzed information on IE implications in Latvian schools (partnering with CEI) will be adopted and used in the development of Effective School model that will be submitted to the MOE at the end of 2012. Inclusive Education Latvian experience presentation at 4 schools
 - o Seminar with participation of Education NGOs, IE experts and IE schools on Inclusive education developments and highlights: Latvian case – 2nd November at the CIE office

As another follow up to this activity, CIE also will work on a joint proposal together with Latvian partners for a project on Piloting of Inclusive Education Resource Center with support of local authorities. Preliminary discussions were held with the Head of Azerbaijan Municipalities Association Tofiq Hasanov and the Latvian delegation of Jekabpils municipality and education authorities invited to Baku, between October 22-27, 2012.

4.1.4. Support offered for Professional Development

Capacity building among its members is at the core of ISSA's work. ISSA and its members remain committed to self-improvement, acknowledging that development never stops. ISSA continued during 2012 to provide its members with **information on opportunities for professional development** - from new relevant resources available to opportunities for courses, trainings, and international conferences, which would help ISSA members to develop new skills and network with relevant organizations and potential donors. Such news were shared on the Online Community.

Continuing with a mechanism started in 2011, the **professional development funds** (PDF) were available also in 2012 to those members who served as Program Committee members and as Regional Anchors. Members were invited to apply for the funds corresponding to the positions they serve during the year. All applications are reviewed by the Program Director during the year and reports need to be submitted within 10 days after the activity was concluded. Given the applications received during 2012, it can be said that, again, these funds are highly appreciated and put to good use. Six applications aimed for attending the European Training of Trainers *Inclusion in practice: Implementing equity and respect for diversity*, an ISSA-DECET cooperation, which was organized in Barcelona in May (mentioned above under Goal I). Other 7 applications focused on attending professional development courses (including one study visit) and three on purchasing books/publications. Three applications used the PDF for deepening the understanding of the resources in the Quality Resource Pack of the staff and their master teacher trainers.

Applications from NGOs represented on the Program Committee

	NGO	Name	Professional Development Activity
1.	CEI Step By step - B & H	Miroslava Marjanović	On-line course "Teaching for a Positive Future"
		Gena-Sanja Handžar Elvira Lakota	Training for trainers on "Positive Discipline"
		Radmila Rangelov Jusovic	NEPC Summer School 2012 Educating for sustainability
		Radmila Rangelov Jusović Gena-Sanja Handžar Elvira Ramčilović Lakota Miroslava Marjanović	ISSA's Annual Conference
2	Step by Step Benevolent Foundation Armenia	Ruzanna Tsarukyan Marine Mkrtchyan	European Training of Trainers „Inclusion in practice: Implementing equity & respect for diversity"
3	Pas cu Pas Moldova	Cornelia Cincilei	European Training of Trainers „Inclusion in practice: Implementing equity & respect for diversity"
		Cornelia Cincilei Valentina Lungu Marina Olevschi Olga Olevschi	Workshop for the SBS staff and national SBS trainers/mentors based on the new resources from the ISSA Quality Resource Pack
		Cornelia Cincilei	Purchasing Books
4	CIE – Azerbaijan	Lamiya Sharafkhanova	European Training of Trainers „Inclusion in practice: Implementing equity & respect for diversity"
		Lamiya Sharafkhanova	Purchasing Books

5.	Educational Research Institute - Slovenia	Jerneja Jager	European Training of Trainers „Inclusion in practice: Implementing equity & respect for diversity”
		Tatjana Vonta Mateja Režek Sonja Rutar Jerneja Jager Petra Zgonec Urša Novak	Workshop on how to use: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Professional Development Tool for Improving Quality of Practices in Preschool and Primary School (the area nr. 6. Learning Environment); - Scoring Sheet for Using the Professional Development Tool (long instrument, the area 6. Learning Environment); - “My Reflective Diary” (ISSA Quality Principles); - Worksheets from Ana del Barrio’s workshop in Barcelona, May 2012 (TOT – ISSA and DECET) – developing professional learning communities; - Presentation on editing video-materials from 4th Regional Conference of Teachers, BiH, Neum 20.08. – 01.09.2012
6.	Center for Education Initiatives - Latvia	Daiga Zaike Kristine Liepina Sandra Kraukle	Study visit to the Research and Documentation Centre on Childhood La Bottega Di Geppetto – San Miniato, Italy
7.	Open Academy Step By Step -Croatia	Helena Buric Sanja Brajkovic	International Training “Quality Management in Education Process” organized by the Pedagogical Center of Montenegro (PCMNE) and Montenegrin Academy of Science and Art – Council for Education (MASA-CE). The main lecturer was Professor Koby Gutterman from Tel Aviv University – Israel
		Sanja Brajkovic Nives Milinovic	Regional conference ‘Change begins in each of us’ held in Neum, Bosnia and Herzegovina, August 29 – September 1, 2012, organized by COI Step by Step
		Helena Buric	Fee for Doctoral study in Pedagogy at the University of Zagreb

Applications from NGOs serving as Regional Anchors

	NGO	Name	Professional Development Activity
1.	FEIS Kyrgyzstan	Anastasia Kutepova	European Training of Trainers „Inclusion in practice: Implementing equity & respect for diversity”
2.	Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation Ukraine	Natalia Sofiy Olga Grynk	Subscription to a series of publications “Debit and Credit”, which includes information on recent changes in the system of taxation and templates of financial reporting (to strengthen the skills of the accountant) Training for accountants on the recent changes to the Taxation Code in Kiev, July 4, 2012, organized by the publishing company “Debit and Credit” Travel to the international Training for Trainers on the Father Support Program organized by ACEV in Istanbul during March 18-23, 2012 European Training for Trainers May 10-12, 2012 in Barcelona – “Inclusion in Practice: Implementing Equity and Respect for Diversity in Early Childhood Settings”

			organized by ISSA jointly with DECET International workshop “Quality Management in the Educational Process” organized by the Pedagogical Center of Montenegro in partnership with the Academy of Science and Arts of Montenegro
3.	Kosova Education Center	Hana Zylfiu-Haziri	International Training Program on ICT Pedagogical Development organized by Life Academy: first in Sweden, second phase in Cambodia.
4.	CEDP Step by Step - Romania	Carmen Lica	Four workshops with SbS team and teachers to build capacity to use the Quality Resource Pack in the SbS network in Romania.

4.1.5. International Representation

ISSA continued to strengthen its key partnerships and to be actively engaged in dialogue and cooperation with relevant external stakeholders. In addition to the key partnership with OSF, exchanges and collaboration continued with UNICEF, the Consultative Group, ICDI, Eurochild and DECET.

The ISSA Secretariat coordinated with DECET the participation of 9 NGO representatives from the ISSA network in a training of trainers on diversity in ECEC Services, in Barcelona/Spain, hosted by DECET member Rosa Sensat, between 10-12 May, 2012 – “*Inclusion in practice: Implementing equity and respect for diversity in early childhood settings*”. This was considered a valuable professional development opportunity by ISSA’s members attending; many of them used the professional development funds to which they were entitled as Regional Anchors or Program Committee members. Although they were encouraged to run workshops as well, unfortunately the ISSA members preferred to go as participants rather than presenters/facilitators. In order to ensure that the expertise of the ISSA network is also represented, using the International Representation budget line, the Secretariat invited an ESJ expert, Jelena Vranjesevic, to run two workshops at the event.

The ISSA Secretariat also initiated closer cooperation with the ARNEC network, a similar ECD regional network for Asia/Pacific. Over the last few years, the two Secretariats have already been sharing information on events and relevant resources which they produced, and now cooperation is also being explored in the area of online sharing/learning. ISSA members in Central Asia have been encouraged again to join ARNEC as individual members and to explore ways to engage with that regional network as well.

ISSA also continued its cooperation with Eurochild, who facilitated ISSA’s participation in the European Commission’s Group of Stakeholder Organisations working in related fields of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and Early School Leaving (ESL), and the meeting organized in Brussels in June. ISSA’s PD was one of the speakers in a roundtable organized in November in Leiden by Eurochild and ICDI on the Quality of early years services, which had as main objective to feed into the work of a Thematic Working Group set up by the European Commission.

4.1.6. Expansion of ISSA’s reach

ISSA’s bodies, especially the Secretariat, the Regional Anchors and the Program Committee, have renewed their efforts to encourage use of the Online Community as a tool for information exchange and collaboration within ISSA’s expanding network. Task forces and committees used the tool to carry on their tasks – for instance there were groups created with members of the Task Force working on the creation of advocacy leaflets around quality pedagogy – targeting different audiences: parents, teachers and decision makers. Another group was created for the OSF/ISSA team working on Materials Re-development: revision of the *Creating Child Centered Classrooms for 3-5 year Olds*. News continued to be posted and the library was further enriched. The Secretariat continued to send via email monthly *What’s New on the Online Community* alerts, which several members reported are very useful and in the appropriate format and frequency. Success in encouraging more use of the online tool is mixed –

more needs to be done to change the network's organizational culture. By monitoring who is online, and how many hits there were for certain pieces of news or uploaded resources, the Secretariat could observe that, while certain staff of member organizations are often signed in and active in posting news, some NGOs are not engaging online at all. ISSA will further explore ways to more efficiently use online tools. There is progress with respect to the fact that more and more NGO staff (not only the Executive Directors) have created accounts, and the participants in the online course pilots (in English and in Slovak) are also now members of the Online Community. It is likely that former course participants will continue to use the tool for the kinds of dynamic exchanges they had during the course, especially since they have already benefited from such exchanges and shared-learning before through the course, and have become experienced at using online tools.

The Secretariat prepared the Online Community to be opened to non-members by creating mechanisms for signing up interested stakeholders – Friends of ISSA – with different level of access to the pages of this intranet – depending on who has license to use the ISSA resources which are offered only through license agreements. In the last months of the year, the Secretariat invited a growing number of Friends of ISSA to join the Online Community free of charge: former individual members, consultants with whom ISSA engaged in the past, individual REYN members, staff from ISSA's partners etc. By the end of 2012, more than 300 practitioners have been signed up.

A license agreement template was drafted to offer license to new ISSA members and to non-members. This was submitted to the ISSA Board for approval.

Counting on possible cooperation with and funding from UNICEF, the Work Plan included plans for updating the online databases developed by ISSA in a previous partnership projects. Due to lack of funding these plans were postponed till funding will be available.

The Secretariat began looking into ways to redesign and update the external website. A template was prepared for a new way to organize the pages of the site, and the Network Manager began looking into possible service providers. A full update and re-design of the external site is planned for 2013.

An important step towards expanding ISSA's reach was the approval of a proposal developed by ISSA in partnership with OSF/ECP, UNICEF and Save the Children International, which aims at setting up an **ECD Advocacy Platform** under ISSA's umbrella. The Platform will be set up with contributions from the founding members and with seed-funding from the World Bank, via a grant received through the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development. The Platform will serve as a forum for improved coordination among development partners, who will advocate jointly for the advancement of the early childhood agenda at the regional and national levels. Joint advocacy by key ECD regional actors would effectively leverage the influence and actions of stakeholder groups, such as government agencies, development partners, civil society bodies, parliamentary groups, child rights lobbies, media, academia, and professionals and service providers from sectors relevant to ECD (education, health, child protection, and social protection). Close cooperation to promote a shared vision that is firmly grounded in the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* and *General Comment No. 7*, would also enable Platform partners to achieve their respective organizational objectives for young children in ECA. Hosting the Platform under the umbrella of ISSA will expand the association's reach in all the countries of the region and beyond. With its existing infrastructure and its experience in network building, expansion and maintenance, ISSA is well positioned to host the Platform. In turn, the ISSA network, which is on the cusp of enlarging its membership and reach, will benefit from the Platform, receiving multi-partner endorsement of its mission and activities and a boost to expanding the network's potential and scope for advocacy. During the last months of 2012, founding members worked closely to develop the proposal. The first steps to set up the Platform are planned for early 2013; activities will continue throughout the year to sign the grant agreement, establish a Steering Committee, agree on an advocacy plan, develop mechanisms for information sharing, survey potential members and recruit new Platform partners and members. Efforts were made already in 2012 to reach out to potential members: the Bernard van Leer Foundation expressed interest. A meeting of the Platform's founding members is planned for early 2013, and an advocacy training is planned for May. After building the foundations during the first year, the Platform will continue to function as the **Advocacy Division of the expanded ISSA network**. Platform members will drive the focus of advocacy, and will also be able to benefit from other services offered by ISSA: training,

assessment tools, newsletters, conferences etc. At the end of the first year, the Platform will be in a position to raise funds from different international agencies in order to continue, widen and refine its advocacy activities, which will include *inter alia* regional and national campaigns, policy roundtables, calls to action, position statements and policy briefs.

4.2. Organizational Management

4.2.1. Planning - Development of a Three-Year Strategic Plan and the 2013 Work Plan

At the beginning of 2012, the ED and the PD prepared a chart outlining the *Process for Developing the 2013-2015 Strategy Framework* - different phases of the process, steps and key bodies responsible, the timeframe and the expected outcomes (see Annex VIII). The proposed plan was reviewed and approved by the Board, and it has guided the **strategic planning process** carried out throughout the year:

The first **Program Committee Meeting** took place in February 2012 in Budapest having the following objectives:

- Organizing the work to support implementation of the ISSA Work Plan 2012: task forces and responsibilities, deadlines
- Preliminary preparations for conducting the ISSA Data Collection/Evaluation Survey in 2012: objectives, tasks and deadlines.
- Preliminary preparations for ISSA's new Strategy Framework for 2013-2015
- Development of a draft sub-strategy so that the ESJ content and training will reach more beneficiaries
- Defining a draft policy on acknowledging authorship of ISSA resources

All objectives were achieved and set of documents were drafted during the meeting, which were collected in a report presented later to the Board during the March Board Meeting - *Report from the Program Committee to the ISSA Board on ISSA's Future Strategy Framework*:

- SWOT analysis based on information presented in the annual reports developed in 2010-2011
- Critical issues that exist now in ECD, considering the larger context of the region
- Critical issues in the field of ECD (from those selected to be addressed in the 2010-2012 Strategy Framework) not enough addressed by ISSA
- Critical issues in ECD that members would like ISSA to address considering what they are trying to address, and ISSA's mandate as professional umbrella association
- Critical issues in ECD that should be addressed more by ISSA in the future, given its capacity and strengths
- Reflecting on our previous Strategic Framework based on SWOT – recommendations for revision of ISSA's vision, mission, operational mechanisms, beliefs, values, principles, goals

During the meeting, Task Forces were set up for specific activities in the work plan, especially the preparation of the two surveys planned for April (on Program Data and the Membership Survey) and the development of the Strategy Plan 2013-2015. In addition, the PC Members also worked on the following drafts:

- *Minimum Requirements for Full Members regarding Quality*
- *Draft ISSA Policy on Acknowledging Authorship*
- *Draft Framework for ISSA's Future Work on Diversity and Education for Social Justice*

All documents were presented to the Board during the March Board Meeting for consultation and discussions.

During the month of March all Program Committee members were involved in developing the **two surveys**:

1. ISSA Member Survey – which evaluated ISSA's functioning and activity in the 2010-2012 Strategy
2. ISSA Member NGOs' Programs and Activity during 2011-2012 – which mapped the programs/projects implemented by the members, their achievements/challenges, partnerships and their contribution so far to the implementation of ISSA's Quality Assurance and Improvement Strategy 2012-2014.

During the month of May all data collected was processed and two reports based on the two surveys were developed under the coordination of the ISSA PD; the reports were shared with Program Committee Members and the Board Members and were used to inform strategic planning process. A third report was prepared later in the year on Financial Data from ISSA Member NGOs. The three reports were shared with ISSA members on the Online Community, and are presented here in Annex IX, X and XI.

During the **Board Meeting** organized in Leiden between 7-9 March, board members provided guidance and input in the strategic planning process by:

- Reviewing and discussing the reports and the recommendations from the Task Force for Income-Generation and from the Program Committee
- Reviewing the draft of the template for the Membership Survey to be conducted by the consultant hired by OSF for the ISSA Review.
- Appointing Board members to work closely with the Secretariat and the Program Committee on planning
- Preparing a list of key points and questions to guide the next steps in the planning.

The second **Program Committee Meeting** took place in May 2012 in Istanbul and focused on the development of the first draft ISSA's Strategic Plan 2013-2015 relying on the data provided by the two reports developed before the meeting, the key points and questions developed by the Board for guiding the next steps in planning, as well as on updates provided by the ISSA ED and PD on ISSA's current context of operation given recent developments in 2012. This three day meeting was very intense in discussions, thinking and reflecting, and led to a preliminary draft of the ISSA Strategy 2013-2015. During June-July, the ED and the PD fine-tuned the *First Draft of the Strategy Framework 2013-2015* and shared it with the Board, the Regional Anchors, the Program Committee and OSF colleagues for input.

During the summer time, Board members, Program Committee members, OSF colleagues and Regional Anchors provided their feedback on the strategy based on a review grid proposed by the ISSA Secretariat. The contributions were very useful and triggered all actors' involvement in clearly defining ISSA's priorities and focus in its work during the next three years, both within the association and in reaching out to its beneficiaries and partners.

The Board Meeting in September in Kyrgyzstan was mainly focused on providing guidance to the process of reviewing the strategy. Discussions were very productive and, due to committed team-work, it led to successful revision of the strategic plan done by the ED and PD in the beginning of October. The document was shared with all Council Members for further consultations during the Annual Council Meeting.

Based on the three years strategy, the ED and PD developed the 2013 Work Plan and Budget which was also shared with the Council Members during the Council Meeting and feedback was collected for further adjustments depending on the agreements on the three year strategy.

The presentation of the Strategy was a team effort of the Board Members and the process of consultation (which was agreed during the Board Meeting) was led by ISSA's President, Ashkhen Gyurjyan. Program Committee members together with Board members were present in each of the 4 working groups organized during the Council Meeting, and they assisted in conducting the discussions around the sections of the Strategy. All Council members participated in providing their feedback by going through each section of the strategy. The results were collected and discussed in the large group so that all members could receive answers to their questions, suggestions or comments. The Three-Year Strategy, its Executive Summary and the 2013 Work Plan are presented in Annex XII, XIII and XIV.

During the last months of the year, working closely with colleagues from OSF/ECP, the ISSA Secretariat also worked on finalizing the REYN Strategy 2012-2015 – presented in Annex XV.

In November 2012, ISSA submitted all strategy documents along with a grant request to OSF for a two year general support grant and a one year grant for the REYN Network. The grant was approved and the funds are expected in early 2013.

In the process of the **ISSA Review**, the Secretariat and the Board members gave input in the plans and template for the Membership Survey, and later, once the report was finalized, they reflected on it and prepared a *Response Letter from the ISSA Board to OSF*, with comments both on the findings and on the process for conducting the review (see Annex XVI).

4.2.2. Monitoring and Evaluation

In the first half of the year, the ISSA Secretariat conducted two surveys:

- The ISSA/OSF Annual Data Collection on NGO's Program Activities
- A Membership Survey which requested feedback on the Implementation of ISSA's Strategy Framework 2010-2012 and the Implementation of ISSA's Strategy for Quality

The *Reports* resulted from these surveys were shared with the Program Committee and the Board to inform strategic planning and later in the year with the Council Members before the Annual Council Meeting. The reports are attached to the Annual Report 2012.

4.2.3. Financial Management

During the March Board Meeting, the Board adopted a *Reserve Fund Policy* for ISSA (see Annex XVII), which outlines the target for the end of 2012 – 40,000 EURO. The Board decided to place in a reserve fund this amount, using funds from ISSA's savings in the last couple of years, therefore this target is already met.

In the first half of the year, an audit was conducted for ISSA Netherlands and one for ISSA Hungary, and a consolidated report was successfully prepared. The *Audit Report 2011* was shared first with the Audit Committee for feedback, and then it was presented to the Board and Council (see Annex XVIII).

ISSA's Budget for 2013 came up to approximately 1 million EURO. The sources of income were divided as follows:

Source	2011	2012
OSF	58 %	62 %
EU	5 %	3 %
Other Grants	28 %	21 %
Sales	7 %	12 %
Membership fees	2 %	2 %
TOTAL:	100 %	100 %

During the year, the Secretariat prepared *Quarterly Financial Reports*, which showed that spending was going according to plans and that, with few exceptions, ISSA is on schedule with all major initiatives under the four strategic goals. They also show that there were sufficient funds raised to cover activities planned for this year, including the necessary admin and operational costs. ISSA needed to use only a small amount from its savings from previous years (approximately 20,000 EURO, which is 2 % of the overall budget) in order to supplement the annual budget. Quarterly financial reports were presented to the ISSA Board and Council, as well as to OSF as part of grant reporting. A final Financial Report was prepared in early 2013 – see Annex XIX.

As one of the findings in the ISSA Review Report highlighted, the Secretariat continues to face challenges in handling the financial management of an increased portfolio of grants, projects and service contracts. As the Board also stressed during the March Board Meeting, there is a need to strengthen the human resources in the Secretariat with regards to financial management, financial planning and self-financing. Options will be explored within the wider plans of moving the office to The Netherlands in early 2013.

The Secretariat summarized all financial policies and practices relevant to members in a draft policy, which was reviewed by a Task Force of board members. The draft will be fine-tuned and finalized with input from the Board during the first months of 2013, after which it will be shared with ISSA members.

4.2.4. Fundraising and Income Generation

In the beginning of 2012, ISSA submitted a proposal to the European Commission's Comenius Lifelong Learning Program (with ISSA as leader of a large consortium) which was unfortunately turned down. ISSA also submitted a proposal to UNESCO for a project focusing on offering an online course on Social Justice and to the Consultative Group (see above under 4.1.6 Expanding ISSA's Reach) for setting up an ECD Advocacy Platform for CEE/CIS. Both of these proposals were approved.

A new service contract with IBM funding was approved to offer ISSA's Online Course for Kindergarten Teachers to two new groups in 2012-2013 – a course for an English speaking group, and one for a Spanish-speaking group. Participants will be recruited from different parts of the world, primarily from early years centers where IBM employee enroll their children.

A Task Force set up in October 2011 prepared a report for the Board, which had as annexes different scenarios for self-financing: sales of trainings, sales of resources (online or in hard copies), sales of consultancy, events etc. A meeting of the **Task Force for Income Generation and Sustainability** was organized in Bucharest on 25-26 January, when participants:

- Took stock and assessed ISSA's organizational readiness for self-financing
- Explored implications for the mission and values
- Identified and explored possible scenarios for self-financing

As a result of the meeting, the Task Force prepared a *Report to the Board on Self-Financing Options for ISSA* (see Annex XX). The Report will inform the development of a sub-strategy for self-financing within the future Strategy Framework. The next steps will be to hire a consult for market research, and decide which scenarios should be pursued more in-depth with the development of business plans. Work will continue in 2013.

4.2.5. Grant reporting

During 2012, the Secretariat worked on preparing the Annual Report for 2011, monthly program updates, as well as reports for the different partnership projects:

- A Good Start-EU funded
- A Good Start-BvLF funded
- Roma Good Start Initiative – UNICEF funded
- Online course pilot with IBM funding

All reports were prepared on time, and seemed to have met all donors' requirements.

4.2.6. Office Relocation

Following up on discussions in 2011, the issue of office relocation was high on the agenda of the March 2012 Board Meeting, which was organized in Leiden, to give the Board the opportunity to see the possible new location of the office, and to meet with representatives of the Utopa Foundation, the owner of the premises – the Child Rights House. The Secretariat prepared a comparative financial analysis between office costs in Budapest and potential office costs in Leiden. The analysis showed the additional costs and administrative burden of having two legal entities, as well as the fact that by moving to Leiden and keeping only one legal entity, operational costs would be similar (not taking into account yet all aspects of staff costs, on which more information is needed). The analysis referred primarily to organizational costs, and not to individuals' cost of living and employee's taxes. More research is needed on these and the Secretariat will work on it together with a Task Force appointed by the Board - Sarah Klaus and Jan Peeters – to continue to explore and compare HR implications (taxes, any necessary adjustments in the salary scales, cost of living etc.). They will consult with different sources (accountants, tax

advisors, other organizations) to gather information. The Task Force will later present proposals to the Board, including on creative ways to motivate and support ISSA staff to relocate.

Taking into account the comparative analysis, the potential support and collaboration with Utopa Foundation, and also the partnership and fundraising opportunities ISSA would have by being in The Netherlands, the Board decided that ISSA should relocate its office. There was one concern raised by an external member with regards to the symbolic perception and branding - moving the ISSA Office outside the CEE/CIS region may lead to changing the focus of the association, or changes in the way it is perceived. Board members carefully reflected on this and agreed that keeping a strong CEE/CIS focus/profile and protecting ISSA's brand are both very important and concluded that the office location is not the primary factor in this respect.

Along with the decision to relocate the office, the Board decided that ISSA should keep only one legal entity (ISSA Netherlands), and that ISSA Hungary should be closed down. After the Board Meeting, the ED began looking into this, by having discussions with Hungarian lawyers and accountants.

The office move is planned for late April/early May 2013. In preparation for the office move to Leiden/The Netherlands (planned for April 2013) and in light of recent growth in programming and networking activities, ISSA began recruiting to fill four staff positions (http://www.issa.nl/news_issa_fill_four_staff_positions.html):

- Senior Program Manager (new position)
- Program Manager to lead the Romani Early Years Network (REYN) (new position)
- Finance Manager and Head of Social Enterprise Division (new position)
- Office Coordinator (to replace a Hungarian staff member who is not relocating to Leiden).

4.3. Governance

4.3.1. Board Meetings

During the first half of 2012, the ISSA Board met in person in early March in Leiden, and also conducted several conference calls and email consultations on issues which needed their input, for instance organizing an electronic vote for the Council on the Membership Framework documents and preparing the response letter to OSF on the ISSA Review Report. In addition, several Board members actively served on Task Forces: the Membership Task Force, the Conference Organizing Committee, the Task Force working on the new membership application form and the one working on a draft financial policies and procedures relevant to members.

During the March Board Meeting, in addition to discussing the office relocation and adopting the Reserve Fund Policy mentioned above, the ISSA Board also conducted a performance review for the Executive Director, reflected on the strategic planning process and key questions, and on membership issues. They also discussed the report prepared by the Task Force on Income Generation and Sustainability. See the March Board Meeting Minutes attached in the Annex XIX.

In consultation with the Regional Anchors and members in that sub-region, the ISSA Board decided to host the second Board Meeting in Central Asia. The meeting was organized in Bishkek/Kyrgyzstan in early September, when a professional development event and an advocacy roundtable were also organized involving Board members (see more information about the activities in section 4.1.3. of this report). The most important item on the Board Meeting agenda was strategic planning – working on the first draft of the Strategy Framework 2013-2015 (more information about the strategic planning process can be found in section 4.2.1). On the agenda of the Board meeting were also the following issues:

- Discussions on key sub-strategies (for instance the sub-strategy for membership expansion).
- Preparing the agenda of the Council Meeting in Opatija/Croatia.

A shorter third Board meeting was organized in October 2012 prior to the Council Meeting, when the Board made final preparations for conducting the Council Meeting, running consultations and organizing the vote on the strategy.

Minutes of the Board Meetings from March, September and October are presented in Annexes XXI, XXII and XXIII.

4.3.2. Council Matters

Based on agreements reached during the October 2011 Council Meeting, the Board decided that ISSA will carry out an electronic vote for the Council on two key issues:

- An open vote to vote on the revised Internal Regulations and new Membership Framework documents
- A secret vote to elect an external member of the Nominations Committee.

The voting was successfully carried out electronically.

In October 2012, the Annual Council Meeting was held in Opatija after the ISSA-DECET-Open Academy Step by Step Conference took place. The meeting focused on:

- Strategic Planning Consultations and vote
- Board Elections
- Regional Meetings and reports from Regional Anchors
- Updates from the Secretariat on programmatic and financial issues
- Discussions around the process of enlarging ISSA's membership as well as other membership issues
- Consultations on ISSA's programmatic products: Leaflets to advocate for Quality, ISSA Portfolio on Quality
- Reflections on ISSA's 2012 Conference

During discussions on Membership Issues, it was agreed that ISSA will explore ways to determine the value of services to new members, possibly by organizing a focus group discussion and a market survey in 2-3 countries. External Board Member, Mark Ginsberg, volunteered to support the process. The Center for Education and Professional Development in Romania volunteered to organize focus groups. Based on the findings, the Council may later decide to revisit the membership fees.

There were also discussions related to **members' engagement**. During small group discussions and in plenary, members reflected that since all governing bodies showed a lot of commitment and worked effectively in the last years on consolidating many of the organizational issues which are essential for a good functioning, it is equally important to have higher member engagement and responsiveness to ISSA's initiatives. The success of many ISSA initiatives depends on the members' commitment and involvement. A particular issue was cited to be the fact that some members do not come prepared to Council Meetings by reading the documents which are on the agenda to be discussed. Council Members agreed that this is an issue which needs to be addressed.

Taking into account the recommendation from the Nominations Committee to consider changing the procedure for bringing in independent board members to the Board, the Council established a **Task Force** to work on new proposals. Henriette Heimgaertner was appointed to serve on the task force. It was agreed that the Secretariat will invite nominations after the Council Meeting and then a vote was organized via email. Two new members for the task force were elected from among council members: Kristine Liepina and Milena Mihajlovic. The Task Force will begin its work in early 2013 and will prepare proposals to be presented to the 2013 Council Meeting.

The Minutes of the October 2012 Council Meeting are attached in Annex XXIV.

4.3.3. Board Elections 2012

In one of the Board Conference calls, the Board decided to appoint Siobhan Fitzpatrick to serve as the Board representative on the Nominations Committee in 2012. During an electronic vote, the Council elected Henriette Heimgaertner to serve as external member along with Emil Buzov, who was elected by the Council in October

2011. The Committee being complete, they began their work to prepare the Board elections 2012. The Secretariat provided logistical support by providing them with all the relevant documents: an updated Board Matrix, the revised Internal Regulations, samples of Call for Nominations from previous years etc. The Committee sent out the Call for Nominations 2012 during the month of July. The Committee organized the Board Elections 2012, which resulted in Regina Sabaliauskiene being elected on the beneficiary seat and Myriam Mony on the independent seat. Regina was also elected to serve as President Elect.