



INTERNATIONAL
STEP by STEP
ASSOCIATION

ISSA ANNUAL REPORT 2020

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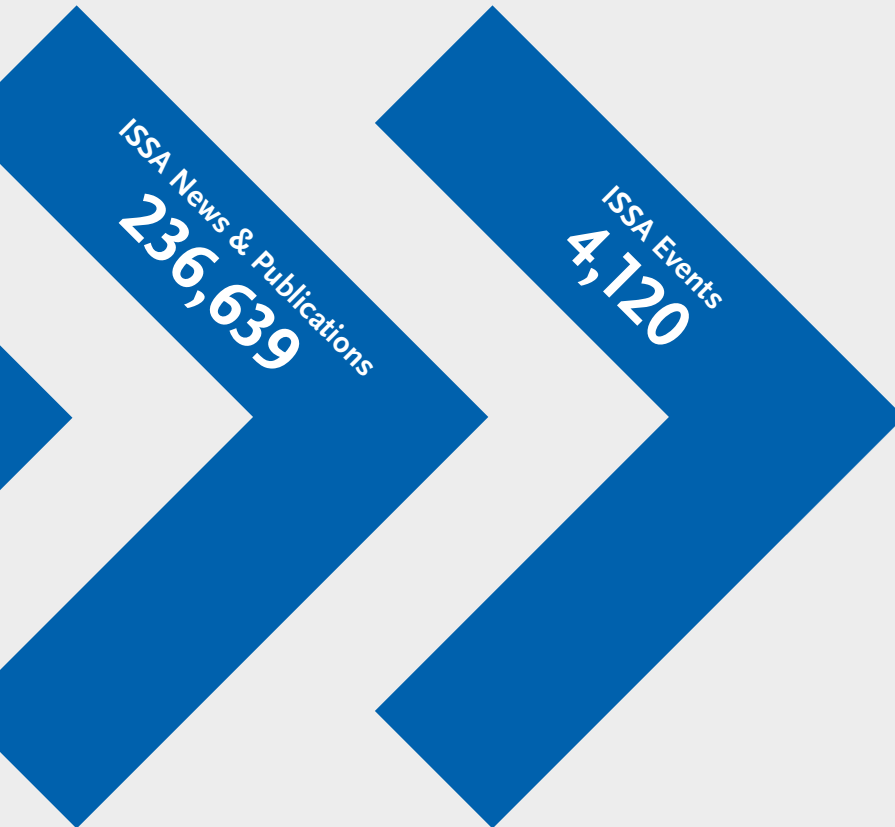
2020 Financial Statement

ISSA'S ACTIVITIES

ISSA Sharing Spot	ISSA Knowledge Hub	Creating Child- Centred Classrooms
Early Childhood Matters	Early Childhood Workforce Initiative	ISSA Events Calendar
Mailings	ISSA Connects Week	Peer Learning Activities
Members' Room	Learning sessions and workshops	Romani Early Years Network
Primokiz	TOY for Inclusion	EU-level advocacy events
Joint Learning Labs	Prioritizing Early Childhood Development in Europe	Other Program Initiatives

Sharing knowledge
 Connecting and learning
 Mobilizing expertise

Social Media and Newsletter
467,964





Henriette Heimgaertner
ISSA Board President



Liana Ghent
ISSA Executive Director

The year 2020 was like no other for ISSA. The challenging situation when we could no longer meet in person has made more visible the invisible ties that connect us regarding the work ISSA does for young children and their families.

COVID-19 circumstances made us be even more intentional about finding out what our members need most, especially those working at the frontline, and how to make our services most meaningful.

The fact that ISSA has a strong network, built on a long tradition of peer support and learning from each other, of joining forces, made it possible to quickly activate the “muscle memory” of sharing knowledge and supporting collaborative actions to rise to the new challenges.

This report looks back at 2020, when ISSA turned a new page as a growing and resilient learning community. With a proactive and agile approach, ISSA facilitated learning and exchanges through webinars and workshops, in which

our Members’ innovative and noteworthy practices in early childhood were made more visible. Peer Learning Activities were adapted to serve best the growing of expertise in our network. Furthermore, a new Member-driven initiative to learn and grow professionally was launched: the Joint Learning Labs, aiming to nurture group learning and discussions, and to co-create useful knowledge around specific thematic areas related to high-quality, equitable and integrated services for young children.

We also joined forces with Members and other powerful networks to advocate for young children, their families and those working in early years, especially in these challenging times when so many issues are competing for attention on decision-makers’ agendas.

Although the 2020 ISSA Conference was postponed, since travel was not possible, the ISSA Secretariat hosted “*ISSA Connects Week*”: a full online event for professional development which

reinforced our sense of community. This brought together more than 200 participants and included 10 interactive thematic sessions designed to stimulate learning and sharing while feeling part of the ISSA community.

ISSA has emerged from 2020 more committed than ever to facilitate peer support and learning, to collect, share and create knowledge for profiling the importance of early years and a resilient early childhood system, to support our Members and others working at the frontline, and to contribute to the early childhood field both in our region and globally.

In 2021, there will continue to be a need to navigate changing times, and ISSA will go on with facilitating learning across countries, sharing promising ways to develop programs and policies for young children, and helping to keep young children and families at heart.

The International Step by Step Association (ISSA) is an international learning community powered by the leading early childhood experts in Europe and Central Asia.

We unite and support professionals and partners to deliver high-quality early years services equitably. We challenge existing knowledge and practice and co-construct new approaches and models.

ISSA's vision is a society where all families, communities and professionals work together to empower each child to reach their unique full potential and embrace values of social justice and equity.

Established in 1999, ISSA's office is located in Leiden in the Netherlands.

STRATEGY 2019–2023

ISSA's Strategy 2019–2023 builds upon the previous strategic period, in which ISSA made a shift towards: being a platform for members' learning and cooperation and the co-creation of knowledge; being a valuable contributor to and a key

player in the early childhood field.

With the belief that working in one area reinforces the other, ISSA will follow the same strategic direction, seeking a mutually beneficial balance between the two-fold positioning.

The year 2020 was not as ISSA had planned

While ISSA continued to keep strategic goals in focus, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected ISSA's work in 2020. The advantage of having a network became increasingly apparent, both within ISSA itself and with the peer networks on other continents. Knowing that its Members were at the frontline, protecting the well-being of young children and their families, ISSA did not spare any efforts to support them with all possible approaches, from sharing new resources and facilitating exchanges through webinars and workshops to sub-granted funding for joint initiatives. Similarly, ISSA actively engaged with partners and Members in advocacy and awareness-raising actions around the importance of the early years, of quality and equitable services, and of having a qualified and diverse workforce when addressing the emerging needs and priorities resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

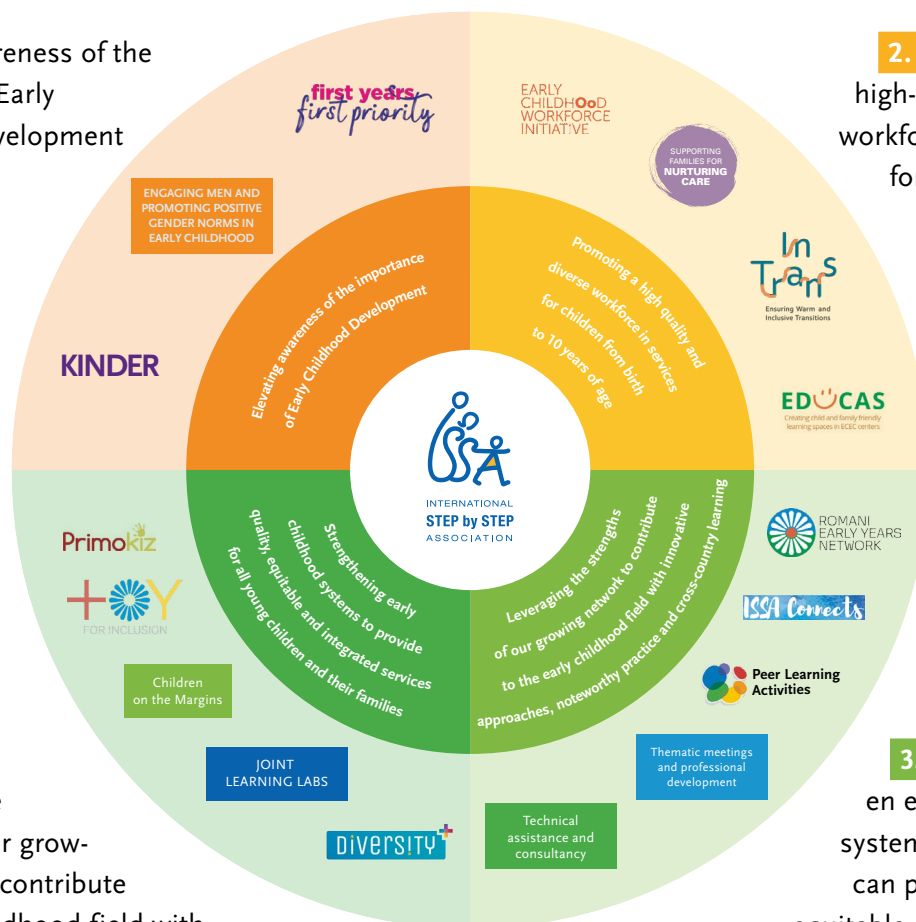
ISSA's Strategic Goals for 2019–2023 are a continuation of the previous strategic period, but with a sharper set of focus points:

1. To elevate awareness of the importance of Early Childhood Development

2. To promote a high-quality, diverse workforce in services for children from birth to 10 years of age

4. To leverage the strengths of our growing network to contribute to the early childhood field with innovative approaches, noteworthy practices, and cross-country learning

3. To strengthen early childhood systems so that they can provide quality, equitable and integrated services for all young children and their families



ISSA is an association that functions as a platform for professionals and organizations working in the field of early childhood development. Our membership includes a range of organizations representing the wide diversity of needs and services in the early childhood field: from NGOs, professional associations or academic institutions, to public bodies or international organizations. Our Member Organizations work in 42 countries, most of them in Europe and Central Asia.

In 2020, ISSA welcomed six new organizations to the network, ending the year with 92 member organizations.

In 2020, ISSA became more aware of the network advantage, especially in times of crisis. As soon as the COVID-19 pandemic began, ISSA aimed to support its Members in every possible way, trying out new channels and mechanisms, and striving to tailor its services and content to Members' needs.

ISSA MEMBERSHIP BASE AT THE END OF 2020

	No of countries	Members
European Union	20	50
Rest of Europe and Central Asia	17	36
Other parts of the world	5	6
Total	42	92

GLOBAL FOOTPRINT OF ISSA MEMBERS IN 2020



OVERVIEW OF ISSA MEMBERSHIP SERVICES PROVIDED IN 2020



Knowledge sharing: Through a wide range of platforms, ISSA curates and shares resources, practices and expertise from the Network and beyond on recent advancements related to early childhood issues.

- ✓ Latest news from ISSA and the global ECD community (18 ISSA Newsletters and 14 Member Updates)
- ✓ Curated ECD Resources related to COVID-19 on the ISSA website
- ✓ 200 resources and 30 noteworthy practices from the ISSA Network in ISSA's Knowledge Hub
- ✓ *ISSA Sharing Spot* on the ISSA Homepage website, highlighting resources or practices from Members
- ✓ *Member in Focus* articles, profiling 10 first-hand experiences and new approaches from Members
- ✓ *'Walk the Talk' in Times of Crisis. Noteworthy Practices from the Early Childhood Field*, a report featuring five ISSA Members' responses to the COVID-19 crisis
- ✓ News about relevant events across the world, 112 online events promoted in the ISSA Calendar, and a YouTube channel with video recordings, as a non-time bound opportunity to learn
- ✓ Facilitating access to knowledge in countries: *Early Childhood Matters* articles and the book *Creating Child-Centered Classrooms* (translated into 13 and 23 languages respectively)

Connecting and Learning: As a growing learning community, ISSA continues to strengthen the connections and collaboration among its Members and also facilitates or provides professional-development opportunities within and beyond the Network, both on early years topics and organizational development.



- ✓ 5 Peer Learning Activities
- ✓ 33 ISSA-hosted online webinars and workshops
- ✓ 9 Members' Room sessions
- ✓ 13 sessions during the *ISSA Connects Week*

Mobilizing expertise: ISSA fosters cross-border collaboration on areas of common interest around early childhood issues within Europe and Central Asia, as well as connecting with peer networks from other continents.



- ✓ Joint Learning Labs – launched in 2020
- ✓ Call for prioritizing early childhood in the European COVID-19 response
- ✓ Call on behalf of young Romani and Traveler children
- ✓ Priority actions to protect, support and strengthen the early childhood workforce

Thematic areas covered include:

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| ✓ supporting early childhood workforce and their professionalism | ✓ playful parenting |
| ✓ inclusive services and reaching the most vulnerable children and families | ✓ father engagement |
| ✓ quality pedagogy and learning environment | ✓ urban and cross-sectoral approaches |
| ✓ technology in early years | ✓ fundraising |
| | ✓ digital storytelling |
| | ✓ the use of decision science |

MEMBERSHIP DIVERSITY



New Members in 2020:

Muzeiko Foundation, Bulgaria

Ensemble for Early Childhood Education, France

Early Childhood Research Centre, Dublin City University, Ireland

Generali Foundation – The Human Safety Net, Italy

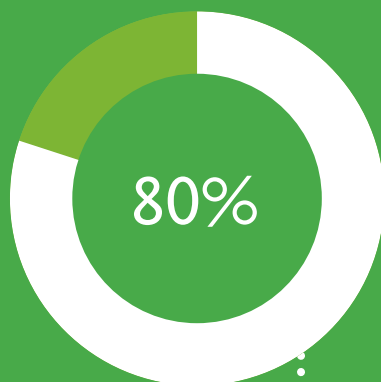
TNO-Child Health Research Group, the Netherlands

Worldwide Orphans Foundation, USA

Total **92**

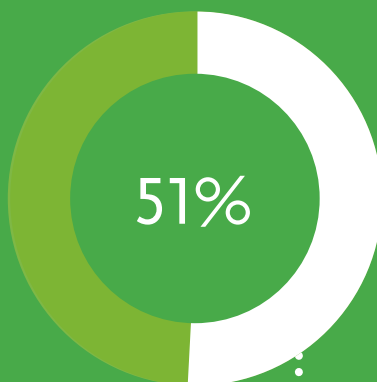
FEATURING ISSA MEMBERS IN 2020

Engaged in ISSA's
Initiatives and Operations



Percentage of
Members participating
in ISSA online events,
trainings and activities

Featured on ISSA's
communications channels



Percentage of
Members featured
as "Member in Focus",
highlighted in briefs
and resources, or on
ISSA's news section

Shared resources on
ISSA's Knowledge Hub



Percentage of
Members featured on
the ISSA Knowledge
Hub for their work on
promising practices
and/or resources

SHARING AND ACTIVATING KNOWLEDGE: AT THE HEART OF ISSA

As a network, ISSA is strongly positioned to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and resources from around the ECD field with its Members and share knowledge and resources created by/with Members and partner organizations. Efforts increased in the context of COVID-19.

ISSA uses different mechanisms, expertise and resources to share and activate the knowledge it has created, collected and curated.

Knowledge Hubs: ISSA runs three sharing environments: a newly redesigned [ISSA Knowledge Hub](#) hosting a wealth of resources developed by ISSA and its members, in different languages; the [Early Childhood Workforce Initiative Knowledge Hub](#); and the [Inclusion of Roma children – REYN Knowledge Hub](#).

Member in Focus: Sharing first-hand experiences and new approaches from Members via interviews or articles.

COVID-19 Resources page: Early childhood [resources](#) from around the field for professionals, families and communities, focused on responding to recent challenges.

ISSA Sharing Spot on

[ISSA's homepage](#): Featuring Members' resources or practices.

In addition, ISSA is increasing access to existing early childhood knowledge in different countries. For the second year, ISSA has invited Members to disseminate articles from the international journal *Early Childhood Matters* by translating them into local languages, using innovative ways to circulate them. In the 2020 edition, 12 ISSA Members selected 14 articles translated into 13 languages, covering a diversity of topics: from caregivers' mental health and the importance of identity at an early age, to scaling early childhood services in cities and the effects of climate change on child development. Using videos (sometimes with celebrities) shared on social media, questionnaires with students, or round tables and webinars, ISSA

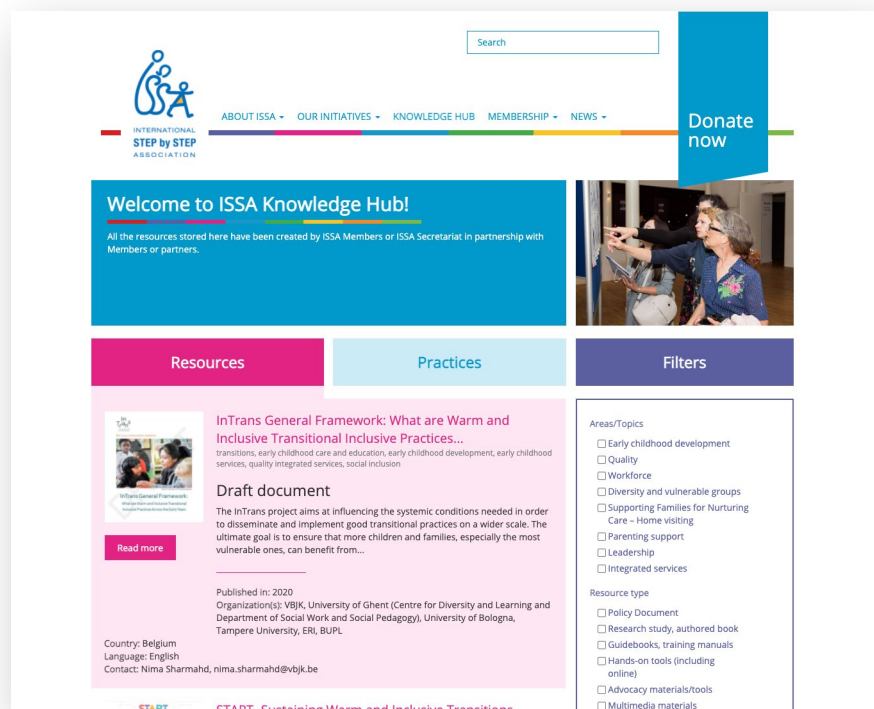
Members have brought knowledge of cutting-edge international early childhood development into their contexts.

Similarly, ISSA has awarded small grants to translate and disseminate the book *Creating Child-Centered Classrooms*, published in 2019 with support from Open Society Foundations. A total of 22 organizations from the ISSA network participated in this initiative and the book was translated into 23 languages. Creative approaches were designed to disseminate it to a high number of professionals positioned at various levels of influence: ministries of education, departments of education at the municipal level, universities, teacher-training institutions, or kindergarten teachers.

Being aware that ISSA Members responded quickly and

creatively to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on children and families, the *'Walk the Talk' in Times of Crisis. Noteworthy Practices from the Early Childhood Field* brief was developed to provide an overview of ways in which five ISSA Members across Europe responded to limit the impact of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable

people they serve. In 2020, the most recent resources and practices were collected from Members to further inspire their peers in various countries to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. Nearly 200 resources and 30 noteworthy practices from Members are now accessible from ISSA's recently revamped [Knowledge Hub](#).



ISSA CONNECTS: A WEEK CELEBRATING THE NETWORK'S LEARNING COMMUNITY AND EXPERTISE

200 PARTICIPANTS
8 LEARNING SESSIONS
5 COMMUNITY-BUILDING
SESSIONS
8 ISSA MEMBERS
FEATURED

After 15 previous opportunities to meet one another at ISSA Conferences, the 2020 edition had to be cancelled. In the same spirit of unity as if at a face-to-face meeting, the ISSA Secretariat hosted the [*ISSA Connects Week*](#), a series of online events seeking to stimulate learning and sharing while reinforcing ISSA's sense of community. This was organised for all ISSA Members and those who work with them. ISSA also offered the opportunity for members from other early childhood Regional Networks to join.

The event, which took place in December 2020, brought together more than 200 participants and

included 13 sessions, mostly learning workshops facilitated by 8 ISSA Members or external partners on issues of high relevance for ISSA Members' work and sustainability. The interactive thematic sessions addressed, among other subjects, risky play, digital storytelling, embracing diversity, fundraising, and the role of spaces in early childhood care and education. It also included a masterclass with partners from the Harvard Center on the Developing Child.

There was also time for memorable celebrations during the *ISSA Connects Week*. As the Open Society Foundations Early Childhood Program was closing down in December 2020, ISSA Members and Regional Networks had the opportunity to pay tribute to their enormous contribution in the field of early childhood across the globe, which had started with early education through the comprehensive Step by Step Program across Eastern Europe and Central Asia.



"I had the honor of hosting a Learning Session on risky play during the ISSA Connects Week.

This gave me the opportunity to share insights from our RePLAY research projects with our international ISSA partners. I gave a definition of risky play, outlining its categories, and arguing for its importance. Our partner, Growing Up (Opgroeien – Kind en Gezin), explained how the insights from our research projects are currently being translated into an ECEC policy that promotes an environment that is 'as safe as necessary' instead of 'as safe as possible'. The discussion groups on risky play practice and policy confirmed our assumption that international exchange on the theme can lead to many new insights. That is why we are now, even more, looking forward to the ISSA Joint Learning Lab on risky play, which we will organize in 2021."

Helena Sienaert, researcher at Artevelde University of Applied Sciences, Belgium

JOINT LEARNING LABS: FOSTERING CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATION AND LEARNING

In its efforts to strengthen the capacity of the network as a learning community, ISSA launched a new service called the Joint Learning Labs in 2020: a channel for members to connect around specific thematic areas, with the aim to nurture group learning, professional discussions, and co-create knowledge.

In May, the first Lab, **Services and Policies for Early Childhood Intervention (ECI)**, was created by a group of Members to better provide high-quality ECI services,

strengthen cooperation with parents, prevent burn out among staff of ECI services, and advocate for better ECI policies.

Six ISSA Members have been sharing good practices both at practical and methodological levels on how to strengthen the capacities of the ECI professionals, how to address current challenges and how to best support families with children with developmental problems. Furthermore, guest experts have been invited to enrich the professional exchange.

ISSA Members currently participating

- ✓ [SOFT tulip Foundation](#), the Netherlands – co-ordinator
- ✓ [For Our Children Foundation](#), Bulgaria – co-ordinator
- ✓ [Centre of Early Childhood Intervention Voinicel](#), Moldova
- ✓ [The Scientific and Educational Center “Biological and Social Foundations of Inclusion” of the Pavlov Institute of Physiology](#), Russia
- ✓ [Association IRODA Parents of children with autism initiatives](#), Tajikistan
- ✓ [Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation](#), Ukraine



“Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) is a crucial support service to families with a child (0–4 years old) at risk of having or with developmental problems. The For Our Children Foundation (Bulgaria) and the SOFT tulip Foundation (the Netherlands) have joined efforts to generate more attention for ECI and strengthen the capacities of ISSA Members working in this field. The Joint Learning Lab (JLL) is a great opportunity for providing training and sharing good practices on practical/methodological and policy levels among ECI service providers in Europe and Central Asia.”

*Eric Bloemkolk, Director,
SOFT tulip, the Netherlands*

*Dimitar Ivanchev, For Our Children
Foundation, Bulgaria*

“The ECI Joint Learning Lab connects organizations and people who are eager to learn and work along their shared interest and practices. It enables participants to share experiences and learn from each other, thereby improving their ability to develop. At the Lab, we also have guest speakers so that we can draw from the knowledge of a wider pool of external experts and try to apply it to our own ECI activities. We see the initiative as an opportunity to disseminate successful practices by connecting people across sectors, disciplines, and locations to share ideas and challenges and learn from each other. By cross-referencing a range of perspectives, we are better able to determine which models would be successful in various local contexts. Watch this video for a snapshot of the ECI Joint Learning Lab.”

ISSA'S POSITIONING AS A SERVICE PROVIDER

The solid expertise built through more than 20 years' of work in the early childhood field, highly skilled staff, and specialist knowledge among its membership (which represents a wide diversity of the field in Europe and Central Asia), all give ISSA a unique position to provide technical assistance, tailored in-house training and consulting services.

ISSA's Technical assistance and consultancy in 2020

The Human Safety Net – Maximizing the Quality and Impact of Programs for Supporting Responsive Parenting

Partner	Generali Group, Italy
Objective of the collaboration	To strengthen Program standards, capacity and ability of 46 organizations to work for the well-being of young children and their families in disadvantaged conditions
Areas of expertise	Parenting support, quality standards

Online professional development on early education leadership

Partner	Association for Early Childhood Educators (Singapore) – AECES
Objective of the collaboration	Online professional development sessions, including virtual field visits, for 115 leaders of early childhood centers in Singapore
Area of expertise	Pedagogical leadership

Qualitative research study to strengthen the capacity of “Tipat Halav” nurses in Israel

Partner	Goshen Institute, Israel
Objective of the collaboration	To generate in-depth data that unveils effective processes and strategies in order to achieve a practice change among Parent and Child Health (“Tipat Halav”) nurses in Israel
Areas of expertise	Parenting support, home visits

Foundational ECD competences for the early childhood workforce

Partner	BAIN and the Early Childhood Authority, Abu-Dhabi
Objective of the collaboration	To develop foundational ECD competences for cross-sectoral ECD professions
Area of expertise	ECD competences

TAKING POSITION

Guided by its goals and attention to context, ISSA's programmatic scope (or ISSA's expertise as a regional player) responded quickly to the hardship that the COVID-19 pandemic brought to our lives and our work. In these challenging times, when so many issues compete on decision-makers' agendas, ISSA worked with partners and other powerful networks to advocate for quality and responsive early childhood services for young children and their families (especially the most vulnerable), and for those working in early years services.

Call for prioritizing early childhood in the European COVID-19 response

In May 2020, ISSA joined forces with Eurochild, the European Public Health Alliance and Roma Education Fund to develop a [Position Statement](#) which cogently

invites policy and decision makers to take the recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 into account when prioritizing investments, especially in the case of

vulnerable children and families.

ISSA mobilized its resources for targeted dissemination within the network and beyond, resulting in over 90 endorsements and the availability of the Position Statement in seven languages (Armenian, Bulgarian, Flemish, Hungarian, Macedonian, Russian, Serbian) for Members to further use as an advocacy tool at the national level.



Call for prioritizing early childhood in the European COVID-19 response

A call on behalf of young Romani and traveler children living on the margins

The Roma population is the largest minority in Europe, and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic added to the already existing and long-lasting challenges that many Roma communities face. Following the major issues highlighted by the National Romani Early Years Networks (REYN) active in 11 European countries, through its long-term REYN initiative, ISSA issued a [Call to Action](#) to urge European leaders and country

leaders to provide every child with the proper conditions to ensure protection and support in all aspects of life. The statement was translated into **six languages** and disseminated through the National REYNs. In addition, the Call to Action was endorsed by international partners, the Roma Education Fund (REF) and the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA).

PRIORITY ACTIONS TO PROTECT THE MOST VULNERABLE

Recognizing the specific vulnerability that Roma children and families face in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, ISSA repurposed funds as an immediate response to help National Romani Early Years Networks (REYN) in

11 countries. From April to June 2020, the National Networks reached 6,000 Roma children aged from birth to 15 years old, 1,400 Roma families and 55 preschool and primary school teachers. The funds were used mainly to tackle



shortages of food and medical supplies, and a lack of play and educational materials (including devices to access online learning programs).

PRIORITY ACTIONS TO PROTECT, SUPPORT AND STRENGTHEN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE

‘Preserving and nurturing the early childhood workforce today is key to ensuring the healthy and well-rounded development of all children across early childhood settings.’ This is the underlying message that the [Early Childhood Workforce Initiative](#) (ECWI) conveyed as a quick response to the pandemic through its [COVID-19 Position Statement](#).

To advocate for the important role that the early childhood workforce plays in mitigating the effects of the pandemic, the ECWI’s Position Statement identifies [five priority actions](#) that governments, civil society organizations, and funding agencies must take to support the early childhood workforce and ensure continuity and quality in

efforts to promote nurturing care.

On May 28th, ISSA hosted a [webinar](#) in which panellists from Norway and South Africa discussed the measures taken to protect the early childhood workforce operating during the COVID-19 crisis.

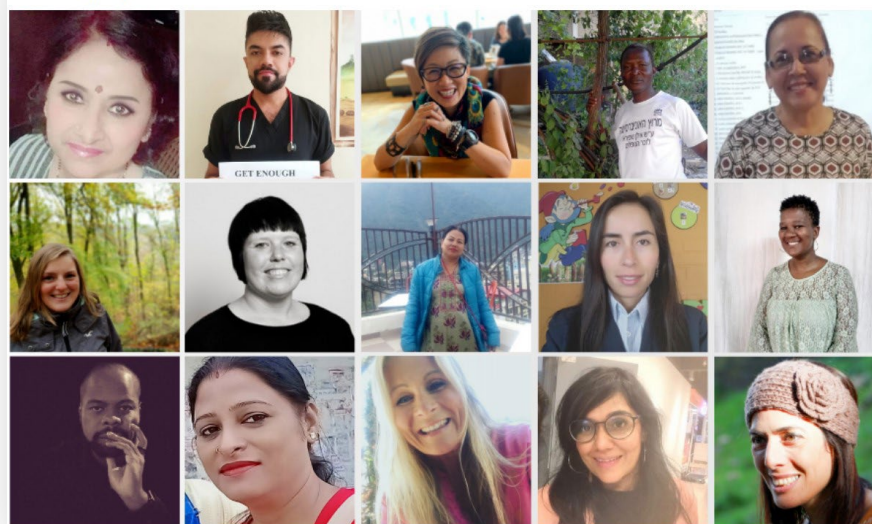
The Early Childhood Workforce Initiative is led by ISSA and Results for Development (R4D).

Voices from the Field series

In an effort to highlight how the COVID-19 crisis has impacted those working in early childhood services across sectors, the [Early Childhood Workforce Initiative](#) (ECWI) launched the [Voices from the Field](#) series in September 2020.

By capturing different voices in the early childhood workforce and sharing their perspectives, the Voices from the Field campaign highlights frontline workers and offers [insights into their everyday realities](#).

Lifting up voices that matter



A total of 17 interviews were conducted in 2020 with early childhood professionals from 11 countries and across sectors;

members of the early childhood workforce speak out for themselves, and at the same time, act as “the voice of children” (Line

Alvheim Elmore, preschool teacher, Union representative, and special education teacher).

PUSHING FOR A FAIR START FOR EVERY CHILD IN EUROPE

On December 15th, 2020 the **First Years First Priority** campaign was launched. Led by ISSA and Eurochild, in partnership with the European Public Health Alliance and the Roma Education Fund, this is a Europe-wide campaign advocating for the prioritization of early childhood development in public policies, funding, and spending so that every child in Europe from birth to six years old receives a fair start in life.

The campaign prioritizes children under three years of age and those belonging to the most vulnerable groups: Roma children; children with disabilities; children living in extreme poverty; and children in or at risk of living in alternative care. By building strong data-informed evidence and national and

cross-national strong coalitions, the campaign aims to influence both European and national policy-makers for greater investment in and attention towards a comprehensive cross-sectoral approach to early childhood policies, funding and services.

The First Years First Priority campaign started in 2020 with nine

countries across Europe (Bulgaria, Hungary, France, Finland, Ireland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Spain) being involved in this first phase, three ISSA Members being leaders of national campaigns. The campaign is planned to run until 2024 and more countries are expected to join.



**Our ultimate goal,
as early childhood experts
and stakeholders, is to
provide the best conditions
and opportunities for
all children in Europe
to develop roundly at their
most, since their conception.**

- Mihaela Ionescu, ISSA

#FirstYearsFirstPriority

*first years
first priority*

Through its initiatives, ISSA works on strengthening the awareness and knowledge of quality, equitable and integrated provisions, so that each young child and their family can enjoy the right to respectful and responsive environments and services.

INFLUENCING SYSTEMS AND POLICY MAKING

As a Regional Network, ISSA joins alliances and contributes to regional and country initiatives aimed at increasing the awareness of the importance of ECD, as well as advocating for stronger political will and investment in services for young children.

Primokiz: Responsive, comprehensive, and well-coordinated early childhood local systems – Romania and Slovenia

After the successful start to the Primokiz approach in Romania in 2019, ISSA continued with the expansion of the approach in Slovenia in 2020, adapting it to the new country context.

A pilot scheme was launched in Romania in 2019 with the ISSA Member organization, the Step by Step Center for Education and Professional Development. This was expanded in 2020 to include Slovenia, in partnership with the Slovenian ISSA Member, Education Research Institute – Step by Step Center for Quality in Education. Under the [Romania Grows with You](#) (RGwY) and [Slovenia Grows with You](#) (SGwY) initiatives, ISSA has been piloting the Primokiz

approach in these two countries.

Given the opportune policy context, the four-year pilot in Romania aims to provide a basis for a paradigm shift towards a professionally integrated ECEC system through the intensive capacity building of underprepared staff working with children under three years of age. It aims to found a cross-sectoral approach to ECD through the local mobilization of cross-sectoral teams capable of developing and implementing data-informed early childhood strategies and plans.

Despite the COVID pandemic and political changes in Romania, the 22 Romanian municipalities are now – after two years – at the

stage of developing cross-sectoral situation analyses to inform local early childhood strategies or plans, and of creating new services, responding to local needs.

In Slovenia, the program has been piloting new ways of designing, planning and delivering responsive and demand-driven services for the youngest children and their families, in a coordinated manner. The initiative in Slovenia has benefited hugely from the Romanian experience. By the end of 2020, 8 municipalities had agreed to take part.

With these initiatives, a partnership with the Jacobs Foundation

enables ISSA to identify the best ways to scale up the Primokiz approach in other countries. ISSA plans to use its network to support such endeavors through a learning community of Primokiz implementers across Europe.

The process-oriented Primokiz approach provides the 'know-how' to enable better coordination across early childhood services at city level. Following the successful implementation of the approach in Switzerland and Germany, the Jacobs Foundation granted ISSA the license to use the Primokiz approach in 2018.



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EVIDENCE-BASED POLICIES AND PRACTICES TO SUPPORT THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE

Through its initiatives, ISSA also focuses on promoting policies and practices that empower and support those who work directly with young children: professionals and paraprofessionals working in various sectors, including education, health, or social protection.

More evidence-based resources to support and strengthen the early childhood workforce

In 2020, the Early Childhood Workforce Initiative (ECWI) continued to build upon its knowledge base in order to influence policy planning and implementation aimed at supporting those who work with children aged from birth to eight and their families.

Following the launch of the **Home Visiting Workforce Needs Assessment Tool** in 2019 for policy makers and program managers, Results for Development (R4D) and ISSA developed a **User's Guide** to provide guidance on the implementation of the Tool. The Tool provides policy makers and program managers with a system view to plan and implement changes for improving home visitors' preparation, working conditions,

performance, and professional growth. After its English edition, ISSA facilitated the translation, development, and dissemination of the Tool in five languages: Arabic, French, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish.

The **Global Landscape Analysis** series was launched in 2018 with two analyses. It continued in 2020 with the release of a further two. The series aims to illustrate the size and scope of the challenges faced by the early childhood workforce, while also highlighting the promising practices that countries have adopted in response. In all, the **four themes** explored include: Competences and Standards; Training and Professional Development; Continuous Quality

Improvement; and Working Conditions. Series briefs have been made available in English, French and Spanish, to expand their reach.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many parenting programs have had to innovate to continue service delivery and help families navigate this difficult time. In response, ECWI released a brief titled **Supporting the Workforce: Parenting Programs Adapt to COVID-19**, highlighting common approaches used when implementing parenting programs as a way of continuing to engage with families, including transitioning to virtual-services delivery and adapting to provide enhanced psychosocial support.

The Early Childhood Workforce Initiative (ECWI) is a multi-stakeholder global initiative co-led by Results for Development (R4D) and the International Step by Step Association (ISSA), supporting and empowering those who work directly with young children.



EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE INITIATIVE

القوى العاملة في المبكرة



EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE INITIATIVE



Home Visiting Workforce Needs Assessment Tool

A User's Guide

2020

In Brief

Strengthening and Supporting the Early Childhood Workforce: Working Conditions

Why focus on working conditions?

Despite growing recognition of the workforce as central to the quality of early childhood services, the environment for these professionals and paraprofessionals remains poor. Challenging working conditions, such as low remuneration, heavy workload, and economic instability, make it difficult for early childhood personnel to foster positive relationships and adequately support the holistic development of children in the early years.^{1,2}

Working conditions encompass the environment in which the early childhood workforce practices, including the social, emotional, physical, and economic factors impacting their well-being, and ultimately the quality of service provision.

This brief is based on a study that explores the working conditions of the early childhood workforce, the range of individuals across the health, nutrition, education, and social and child protection sectors who provide services to young children and their caregivers. The study considers the level of remuneration, factors affecting recruitment and retention, the status and morale of the early childhood workforce, roles and responsibilities, health and safety, and support systems available, among other aspects that directly influence job satisfaction.

About this Brief This Brief highlights findings from a global landscape analysis on Working Conditions, one of a global landscape analysis carried out by the [Early Childhood Workforce Initiative \(ECWI\)](#) to illustrate the size and scope of the challenges faced by the early childhood workforce, highlight promising practices to address these challenges, and provide a comprehensive overview of the status of the workforce worldwide. Policymakers, researchers, program managers, and practitioners can use the findings of these landscape analyses to generate lessons to support and strengthen the early childhood workforce, and enhance existing programs, policies, research, and advocacy efforts.

In Brief

1

المجالات التي تتناولها أداة دراسة احتياجات القوى العاملة في زيارة المنازل أداة دراسة احتياجات القوى العاملة في زيارة المنازل في إطار "مبادرة القوى العاملة في الطفولة المبكرة"

2019

REACHING THE MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Through its work, ISSA promotes the progressive universalism principle, which encourages universal provision with additional services for those in need of a specific approach and support. By ensuring universal provision, all children benefit. By offering additional services, the most disadvantaged, most vulnerable, or those most at risk receive the support they need.

TOY for Inclusion: a lasting impact

TOY for Inclusion has proved to be a flexible approach able to adapt to different contexts and challenging conditions. Over four years, the Play Hubs, a non-formal service promoted by the TOY for Inclusion approach, have reached more than 10,000 children through 16 Play Hubs across 8 countries.

Since 2017, and moving away from the belief that some children and families are harder to reach, TOY for Inclusion has created a well-received approach that makes more accessible services which can adapt during crisis periods and to different contexts. The Play

Hubs set up within this provide a non-formal educational space for young children and their families in order to introduce them to the formal education system in a non-threatening way.

The project was coordinated by ISSA Member [International Child Development Initiatives \(ICDI\)](#) and implemented by a consortium of six ISSA Members¹, and co-funded by the European Commission through the Erasmus+ Program and the Open Society Foundations. Through its experts in the Secretariat, ISSA has contributed to the development of the TOY

for Inclusion Toolkit and the *What Works Guide*, carrying out advocacy and communication activities. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic presented new challenges for the consortium and showcased the importance of the Play Hubs' adaptability. Managed locally, Play Hubs were able to adjust their services to reach children and families even during the COVID-19 lockdowns, and address community challenges, often in ways that formal services could not. ISSA used its communication channels to [amplify the voices](#) of those participating in and benefiting from the project.

1 International Child Development Initiatives – ICDI (NL), Associazione 21 Luglio (Italy), Centre for Educational Initiatives – CEI (Latvia), Open Academy Step by Step – OASS (Croatia), Partners Hungary Foundation, and Wide Open School – WOS (Slovakia)

As part of these dissemination and advocacy efforts, ISSA released an updated explanation of the TOY for Inclusion Play Hubs subtitled in Croatian, Hungarian, Italian, Latvian, Flemish, Slovakian, Slovenian and Turkish. This video is being used for local advocacy efforts in partnering countries.

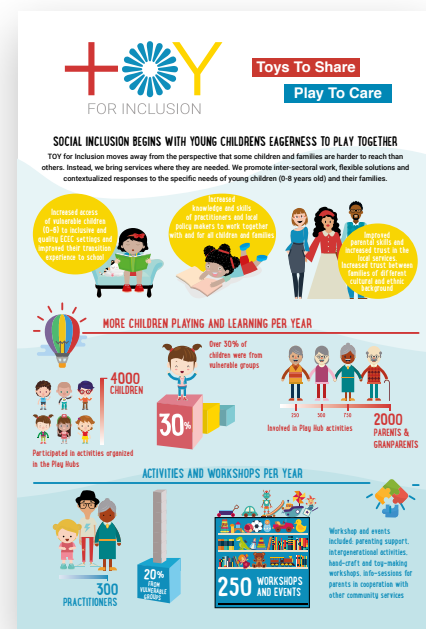
Two advocacy events were organized by the consortium in 2020. The first was hosted at the [European Parliament in Brussels by Slovenian MEP Tanja Fajon](#). The event brought together EU policy-makers, civil society organizations and national implementers to outline the difference that Play Hubs make for the communities in which they operate.

Due to travel limitations in 2020, a second advocacy event called Flexible to Scale-Up took place online. This allowed participants to interact with members of Local Action Teams and families benefiting from Play Hubs. It also highlighted the impact of the project and how cities can play a key role in scaling up the TOY for Inclusion approach. The event launched the new [Virtual Pop-Up Museum](#), hosted on the project website.

“The TOY for Inclusion Play Hubs are an example of meaningful impact reaching all children, including the most marginalized, which is exactly what the European Union is prioritizing in their social and educational policy.”

Geraldine Libreau, Policy Officer responsible for ECEC at DG Education and Culture, and coordinator of the Working Group for Early Childhood Education and Care.

Overall, TOY for Inclusion reached over 10,000 children, 5,000 adults (parents and grandparents); 1,000 practitioners were involved in the TOY for Inclusion Play Hub activities in 2017–2020, with 25% coming from vulnerable groups (migrant/refugee, low-income, Roma, Nigerian, Albanian, Tunisian, special-needs, etc.). In every quarter, at least 100 activities and workshops were organised, 50% of which were facilitated by non-ECEC Play Hub Staff.



At the close of the project in early 2021, the TOY for Inclusion consortium released the project's [Impact Evaluation and Policy Recommendations](#). After four years of work, the project achieved

[extraordinary results](#), including: fostering social inclusion for Romani young children and families; enhancing social cohesion; and easing the transition to primary school.

The consortium is proud that TOY for Inclusion was featured as an example of good practice in the [European Commission's ECEC Working Group Toolkit](#), in March 2021.

Dream to Grow – attracting more Roma professionals into the ECD workforce

At the end of 2019, the 11 National Romani Early Years Network (REYN) engaged in a joint advocacy action to address the critical issue of having more diversity in the ECD workforce. This resulted in the 'Dream to Grow' advocacy campaign in 2020.

Loli is a Roma girl from Europe and, as a child, she had a teacher she could relate to. Her teacher understood the difficulties that Loli was facing. Now 25, with a university degree, Loli works as an early childhood education professional. But Loli's story is different than most. Many Roma children around Europe don't have the same opportunities and conditions that Loli had. Loli is an example of how having the right support and

belief in oneself can make it possible to break the vicious circle that has entrapped the Roma minority in Europe for centuries.

In this vein, the online advocacy action #DreamToGrow (an initiative of ISSA in close collaboration with National REYNs) was launched in July 2020. Based on success stories like Loli's, collected from Roma ECD professionals in 11 European countries, the social-media campaign promoted diversity within the workforce and its impact on early childhood development, reaching 23,500 people.

Later in the year, as a result of the advocacy campaign, REYN (in partnership with the European Roma Grassroots Organisations

Network (ERGO)) co-hosted an online event called [Dream to grow: How to make Europe's labor markets a place for all](#). It highlighted Roma professionals' different paths towards who they are today.

In the form of a virtual human library, Roma professionals from Italy, Scotland, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Belgium, and Romania shared their stories and experiences of how to dream big and achieve goals, regardless the circumstances.

REYN (along with Roma minorities and the National networks) is taking an active role in paving the road towards an inclusive and equitable future. By sharing knowledge, experiences, forward-looking attitudes, and by setting an example

to younger generations, REYN's work seeks to shape Europe's future: to *dream to grow*.

"When we asked people how they succeeded, they did not mention particular policies or diversity measures. They mentioned that it was an institution, an organization or an individual that came and gave them a little tiny nudge."

Stanislav Daniel, co-chair of the ERGO Network.



Supporting teachers working with refugee and migrant children

Under the project *Children on the Margins: Building Bridges – Bridging the Gap*, supported by the Early Childhood Program at the Open Society Foundations, a Guidebook and a Toolkit were published to assist and inform the work of kindergarten teachers in refugee camps and beyond.

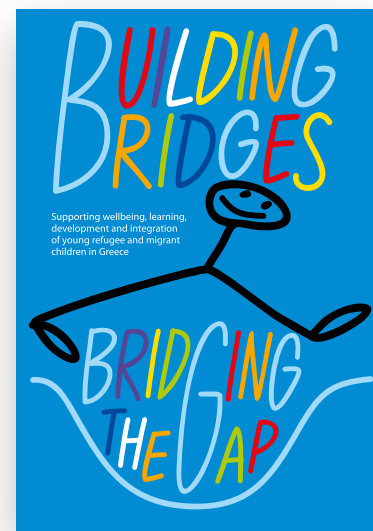
One of the ways to support young refugee children and their families is by providing support for early childhood education and care (ECEC) programs and services.



With this in mind, the *Building Bridges* project enabled such work in kindergartens in refugee camps and in nurseries in different municipalities in Greece. The project was implemented in partnership among ISSA, the Ministry of Education, the University of Patras, and two ISSA Members in Greece: the Refugee Trauma Initiative (RTI) and EADAP.

Based on the experiences of working with refugee and migrant children, the project developed two resources in Greek and English.

Building Bridges – Bridging the Gap is a Guidebook which supports kindergarten teachers. It addresses topics such as creating safe and stimulating early learning environments in camps, providing psychosocial support to children and families, and dealing with trauma. The Guidebook was authored by ISSA, the University of Patras, the Department of Educational Sciences and Early Childhood Education, and the Refugee Trauma Initiative (RTI) in partnership with



the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs.

Young Refugee Children in Greek Early Childhood Day Care Centers – a Toolkit for early childhood educators has been developed by ISSA, EADAP and the municipality of Elefsina. It builds upon the capacities of nurseries to help refugee and migrant parents place their children in responsive and quality nursery services and strengthen social cohesion in the neighborhoods/communities where they are located.

NEW INITIATIVES IN ISSA'S PROGRAMMATIC SCOPE

In 2020, ISSA seized opportunities to join new partnerships that reinforced its commitment to its mission. The association expanded its influential role in shaping the narrative around early years policies and practices at the regional/global level, while empowering members as influencers at country level.



Diversity+ – There is no quality without equity in early childhood services

- ✓ European Union
- ✓ 7 project partners, 6 countries
- ✓ 1 ISSA Member
- ✓ 3-year project
- ✓ Erasmus+

ENGAGING MEN AND
PROMOTING POSITIVE
GENDER NORMS IN
EARLY CHILDHOOD

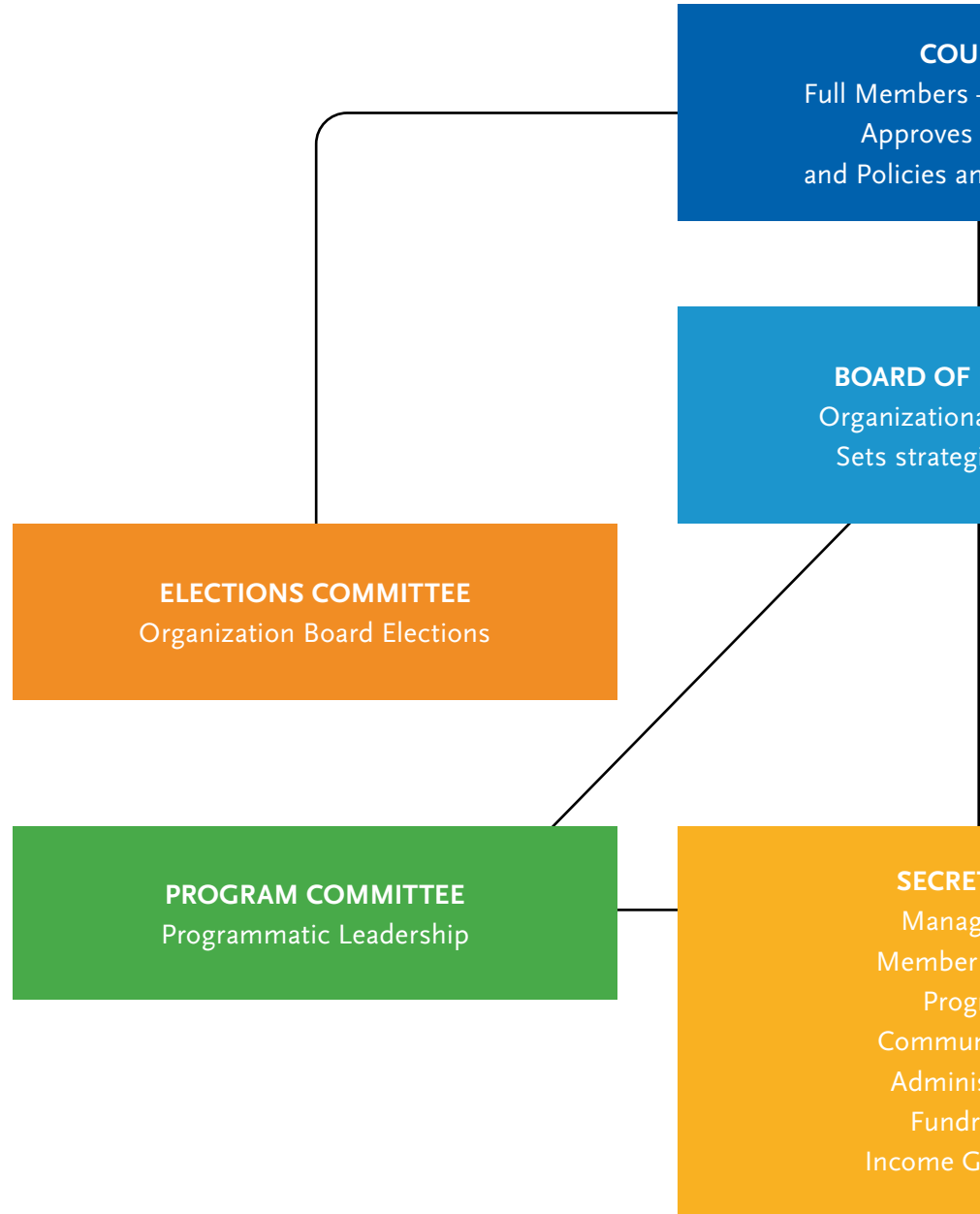
Engaging Men and Promoting Positive Gender Norms in Early Childhood

- ✓ Portugal and further scaling to European countries
- ✓ 3 project partners, 1 country
- ✓ 2-year project
- ✓ Oak Foundation, Erasmus+



InTrans – Ensuring Warm and Inclusive Transitions

- ✓ European Union
- ✓ 7 project partners, 6 countries
- ✓ 2 ISSA Members
- ✓ 3-years project
- ✓ Erasmus+



COUNCIL
– voting rights.
Strategies
and elects Board

DIRECTORS
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AUDIT COMMITTEE
Reviews Audit Report

STAFF
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Services
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MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE
Leadership
on Membership Issues



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Communications Officer



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Finance Officer
& Office Manager



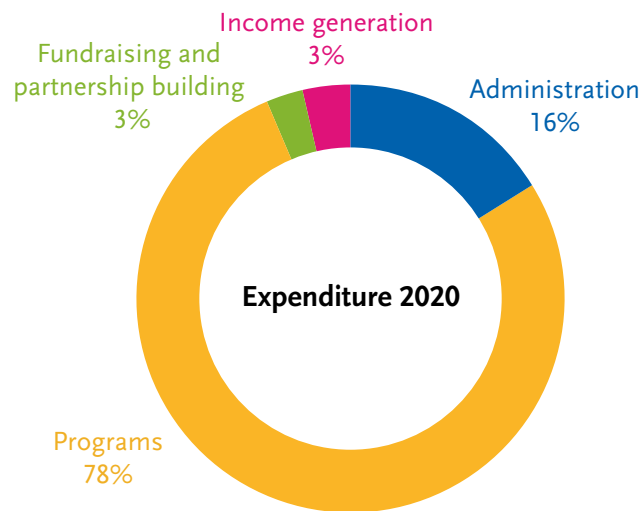
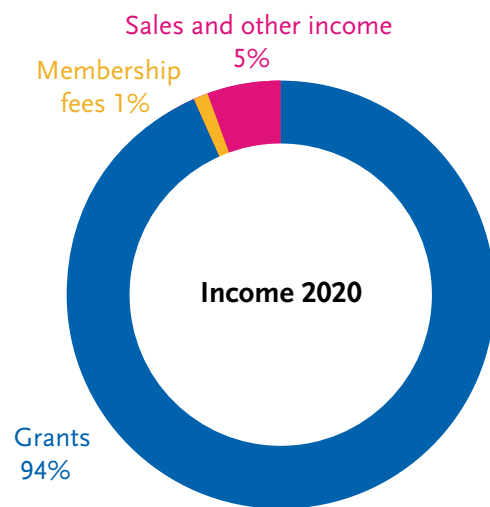
Anna Joostensz
Projects & Operations
Support Officer

2020 FINANCIAL STATEMENT (EUR)

Our finances are kept by a certified accountant and audited by an independent external auditor. The balance sheet and the income statement are derived from the audited annual report.

ASSETS	2020	2019
Fixed assets	10 045	10 644
Grants receivable	1 553 576	2 124 116
Other receivables	86 036	84 676
Debtors	8 406	20 065
Liquid funds	774 543	287 306
Total	2 432 606	2 526 807

EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	2020	2019
Association capital reserve	210 688	182 569
Deferred revenue	2 019 600	2 239 166
Taxes payable	63 480	40 523
Creditors and accrued expenses	138 838	64 549
Total	2 432 606	2 526 807



INCOME AND EXPENSES	2020	2019
Grants	1 443 936	1 425 243
Membership fees	15 370	28 619
Sales and other income	83 758	148 098
Total income	1 543 064	1 601 960
Administration	244 867	215 763
Programs and network functions	1 171 788	1 142 417
Fundraising and partnership building	38 936	43 082
Income generation*	53 313	203 529
Total expenditure	1 508 904	1 604 791
Net operating income	34 160	-2 831
Interest Income	—	—
Exchange differences	-6 041	5 523
Net Result	28 119	2 692

SUPPORTERS

We would like to thank our supporters, central to making our work possible throughout 2020.



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Step by Step Association**
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