



# ISSA

## ANNUAL REPORT 2016



INTERNATIONAL  
**STEP by STEP**  
ASSOCIATION

**ISSA** is a growing network and professional learning community encompassing organizations from almost 40 countries. Together we are dedicated to exploring and improving quality, equity, and access in early childhood education and care through pioneering initiatives and partnership projects.

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

- Do you share **ISSA's** vision?
- Do you work in the field of Early Childhood Development?
- Can your organization benefit from being part of our community?

TO BE PART OF OUR LEARNING COMMUNITY - [JOIN ISSA](#)

*“**ISSA** is one of the first transnational organizations combining state of the art insights both on diversity and on quality in early years. ... What makes ISSA unique is precisely the combination of ethical values and academic knowledge, addressing diversity and quality from a rights-based perspective.”*

**Professor Michel Vandenbroeck**

*Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy, Ghent University, Belgium*

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# ISSA

## ANNUAL REPORT 2016



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**STEP by STEP**  
ASSOCIATION

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# INTRODUCTION

# INTRODUCTION

We are proud to present to you ISSA's Annual Report for 2016. The challenging environment in Europe and across the world during the last year reinforced our belief that ISSA's mission is particularly relevant. The members, staff and Board of Directors of ISSA continued to work passionately to promote the importance of Early Childhood Development and the need to deliver high quality early years services equitably.

The year 2016 was the first year of implementation of the new three-year strategy.

In this framework, ISSA seeks to pursue three major programmatic goals:

1. Advocate for and support competent Early Childhood systems for all children, especially the most vulnerable
2. Increase awareness of the importance of Early Childhood Development and of a qualified workforce
3. Be a leading Early Childhood network and learning community that promotes quality, equitable and integrated services for children, families & practitioners

During 2016, ISSA placed strong emphasis on promoting competent and integrated early childhood systems through its resources, European projects, and various global and regional events. In these efforts, we joined forces with a number of partners and with our members. ISSA also contributed to the Early Childhood Development field by developing globally relevant resources on the quality of services for children from birth to 10 years of age.

Our network's reputation for supporting professionalism in the early years was strengthened in 2016 by undertaking an important role in several regional and global initiatives. Partnering with the UNICEF Regional Office to develop an extended training package for home visitors, we also conducted practitioner training in the CEE/CIS region. Additionally, we now co-host the Early Childhood Workforce Initiative. But, these are just two examples of how ISSA has enlarged its portfolio as a supporter of those who work with young children.

In 2016, ISSA continued to grow as a learning community for Early Childhood Development in Europe and Central Asia. We welcomed new members who bring not only new perspectives from several countries where we have not had members before, but also new expertise into the network. While some countries have seen a huge improvement in the standard of ECD services, the different approaches being taken at the national level means we have a gulf in standards across Europe and Central Asia.

As a growing region-wide network, we have been striving to ensure that learning and best practices are shared at a regional level, thus supporting the rapid spread of innovations. The Peer Learning Activities supported by ISSA are among the most valued services we offer to our members. In 2016, members exchanged and co-created knowledge on topics ranging from the importance of a qualified workforce in Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro supporting Romani children, to creating a group of trained WANDA facilitators in Estonia. And from a train-the-trainer course on the European Quality Framework, to supporting Roma parents in Slovakia access community pre-school, kindergarten and early primary services.

Our successes in 2016 reinforced the fact that our network is well-placed to serve as a valuable pool of expertise for local, regional and

global initiatives. We remain committed to further harness the power of our network for the benefit of young children.

We would like to thank the Board of Directors, the staff, the members and our partners for their work over the last year, and we extend warm thanks also to all supporters and friends of ISSA.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Liana Ghent".

LIANA GHENT  
Executive Director - ISSA



A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Nives Milinović".

NIVES MILINOVIĆ  
President - ISSA





## 2016 - 2018 STRATEGIC PLAN



# ISSA GOALS 2016–18

Advocate for and support competent Early Childhood systems for all children, especially the most vulnerable

Increase awareness of the importance of ECD and of a qualified workforce

Be a leading EC network and learning community that promotes quality, equitable and integrated services for children, families & practitioners

Ensure that ISSA's services and operations are financially sustainable

## CREATE AND SHARE KNOWLEDGE

### STAKE-HOLDERS

- Support a diverse and proactive membership by nurturing innovation in ISSA's learning community
- Convene members and support their advocacy to influence policies and practice
- Create synergies between global, regional and national initiatives, working with other key organisations and networks
- Showcase ISSA as an influential professional association with expertise and experience in quality and equity
- Present compelling philanthropic and commercial propositions to diverse audiences

## NURTURE AND GROW OUR CAPACITY

### CAPACITIES

- Strengthen a learning community of engaged and informed members.
- Identify advocacy topics, develop tools, and mobilize the network & partners
- Be a reliable hub for information and knowledge on quality and equity in ECD
- Increase ISSA's visibility and strengthen our voice in the global discourse on ECD
- Identify and develop opportunities and audiences for commercial and philanthropic propositions

## ENSURE THE RESOURCES TO DELIVER

### LEARNING & GROWTH

- Strengthen skills for recruiting, retaining and engaging members.
- Recruit and retain top experts for program development and implementation
- Know how to use IT effectively for programme delivery and operations
- Ensure we have the right management and leadership skills for the growing network.
- Align our communication competencies with the growth of the network and ISSA's positioning.
- Develop an entrepreneurial skill-set and mindset

## CONVENE, SUPPORT AND INFLUENCE

### RESOURCES

- Introduce a new name and brand positioning that communicates our mission
- Strengthen our resources for communicating with members and external audiences
- Develop saleable commercial offerings
- Increase income, especially unrestricted



## ACHIEVEMENTS



# STRENGTHENING ISSA AS LEARNING COMMUNITY

## Membership – the power of peers

Supported by the 2016-2018 strategic plan and with the help of the Membership Committee, member organizations and friends, ISSA's membership grew to previously unprecedented numbers during 2016.

Finishing the year with a total of 71 members, ISSA welcomed 14 new organizations to the network while continuing to support existing members with actions such as our Peer Learning Activities.

As ISSA's membership grows we continue to build connections and capacity within our network to the benefit of everyone involved.

*"Over the years I have watched ISSA grow 'step by step'. The results: better programs, stronger communities where children and families can thrive and an increasing number of early childhood leaders who are ready to take the next step forward, to give voice to change and to stand up for young children, peace and a better world."*

**Joan Lombardi**

Director | Early Opportunities LLC, USA

### NEW MEMBERS IN 2016

[DIKO-Dienst Kinderopvang Stad Gent, Belgium](#)

[De Sloep, Belgium](#)

[Society of Civic Initiatives, Bosnia-Herzegovina](#)

[For Our Children, Bulgaria](#)

[Trust for Social Achievement, Bulgaria](#)

[Educational and Social Center SOS Kindergarten, Kosovo](#)

[Netherlands Youth Institute, the Netherlands](#)

[Stichting BKK, the Netherlands](#)

[Neohumanist Education Association, Romania](#)

[Research and Education Center "Biological and Social Foundations of Inclusion, Russia](#)

[Child at Street 11, Singapore](#)

[Association of Pedagogical Assistant of Serbia, Serbia](#)

[Romanipen, Serbia](#)

[Rushdi Inclusia, Tajikistan](#)

## ISSA Membership Statistics – December 2016

NUMBER OF MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS	
	71
In countries in the European Union	36
In countries in the other parts of Europe and Central Asia	32
In countries in other parts of the world	3

[Map of ISSA members](#)

### One of the engines of our network – Peer Learning Activities 2016

Core to ISSA's values is cooperative learning. Each year we facilitate and co-fund Peer Learning Activities (PLA) among our member organizations. This is a great learning opportunity exclusive to ISSA members, and which reaps rewards way beyond its investment.

**11** *Peer  
Learning  
Activities*

**23** *members  
involved*

**20** *countries*

***Stronger Together: ISSA members coordinate action on implementing the European Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care***





## Highlights from the 2016 Peer Learning Activities:



**Bureau MUTANT**, the Netherlands, together with the **Centre for Innovation in the Early Years (VBJK)**, Belgium developed a training package for early childhood training providers called “**5 Steps to Quality**”. The training is aimed at translating the European Quality Framework (EQF) for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) into practice. The resource has been made available on the European learning platform School Education Gateway.

The [5 Steps to Quality](#) was introduced to schools and civil society organizations in Belgium and the Netherlands in 2015-2016 and their work will continue in 2017. ISSA members from Bulgaria, Moldova, Montenegro, Macedonia and Slovenia attended a three-day workshop on the “**5 Steps to Quality**” and planned their country actions.

## A School of Conscious Fatherhood in Poland and Tajikistan

ISSA members, the **Belarusian League of Parents and Teachers** (Krok za Krokam) and **Comenius Foundation**, Poland came together in 2016 to support interaction between children and their fathers in Poland, Belarus and Tajikistan.

*“This year the PLA with Polish and Tajiki colleagues was very inspiring for all parts. Our guests had the possibility of visiting Belarusian pre-school centers and were impressed by successful practices presented by Belarusian educators. The participants had the possibility of studying common issues and challenges, as well as discovering roads to facing them. The exchange of good practices encouraged professional development among PLA participants.”*

## Empowering Roma families in Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia

Social inclusion of Roma families was at the center of this activity. ISSA members **NGO Kham**, Macedonia, the **Pedagogical Center of Montenegro** and **CIP-Interactive Pedagogy Center** in Serbia came together to share insights on successful inclusion programs for young children.



*“Our objective is to advocate for the creation of special measures to further the social and economic integration of migrant families in the three countries”.*

Read more about the [2016 Peer Learning Activities](#)  
and to be a part of it: [Join ISSA](#)

## 1. Highlights about members in 2016

In 2016, ISSA members reached out with their programs to approximately:



30,000  
practitioners



450,000  
children



27,000  
families



5,000 policy  
makers

## 2. Members' commitment to vulnerable groups

33

**MEMBERS ARE INVOLVED IN PROGRAMS TARGETING ROMA CHILDREN**

41

**MEMBERS ARE INVOLVED IN PROGRAMS TARGETING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

27

**MEMBERS ARE INVOLVED IN PROGRAMS TARGETING REFUGEE CHILDREN**

## 3. Most important achievements in 2016 for many of ISSA's members

*Getting  
new expertise*

*Successful  
in project  
applications*

*Joining new  
partnerships*

*Successful in  
influencing ECD  
policies*

*Cooperation with  
various ECD  
sector and services*

*Becoming more  
visible on  
the country level*



## Short stories from our members on what they are proud of:

*“When we will look back to the year 2016, we will definitely remember that this was the year when we changed our name, our logo, image, webpage; our appearance for external users. The whole journey was pretty exciting. Also, we would like to point out that we participated at several peer learning activities, which were very inspiring. We especially want to mention the PLA activity which took place in Utrecht on nurturing professional learning communities.”*

*“The Center for Educational Initiatives Step by Step in Bosnia and Herzegovina launched a national Annual Teaching Award for most innovative preschool-, primary- and secondary school teachers. Five teachers received the first ever award for the most innovative teacher of the year in their category”*

*“M., a Roma woman who has been living for the last 10 years in the biggest institutional slum, Salone, in the city of Rome in Italy. M. is 28 years old and she is a mother of 4 young children. Since 2013 M. has been involved in the Associazione 21 Luglio's workshops for mothers, demonstrating interest, curiosity and a strong motivation. Associazione 21 Luglio supported her in obtaining documents and fulfilled bureaucratic procedures such as the request to access social housing. Today, with the smile on her lips that has never left her, M. from being a mother in need of support has become an educator in a pre-school for children aged 3 to 6 in vulnerable conditions, and in the next weeks she will move to live in a social house with her family provided by the Municipality of Rome.”*

## ISSA Conference 2016 – a learning platform for the early childhood community

> **300** participants

**48** countries

> **100** sessions

In October, over 300 members of the global early childhood community met in Vilnius for ISSA's Annual Conference. Early childhood experts, practitioners and policymakers from 48 countries were together in the Lithuanian capital to discuss, network and attend workshops. More than 100 concurrent sessions were held on issues ranging from play-based learning to early childhood education of refugee children.

The conference proved to be very successful and the keynote speakers were highly regarded by the audience. Changes to the format were also welcomed, such as the time built in for networking and the panel discussion around the regional launch of **The Lancet Series on Early Childhood Development**.



More videorecordings from the conference can be viewed on ISSA's [YouTube Channel](#)

*“ISSA conference was an experience of enhancement for me. I felt amazed seeing lots of people participating in the conference coming from such different places in the world, having different backgrounds but all sharing the same objective: child wellbeing. It was really important for me to meet, stay together and work for a common goal, learn and share something (either knowledge or practical tools) with other professionals and practitioners.”*

*Conference Attendee*



# PROMOTING QUALITY AND EQUITY IN INTEGRATED EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

## The Quality Framework for Birth to Three in two more languages

ISSA's [Quality Framework for Birth to Three Services](#) is grounded in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and stands for the centrality of the child and family in conceptualizing, designing and implementing programs dedicated to this age group, no matter the type of service, program, or sector.

This document highlights ISSA's commitment to putting very young children and their families at the center of all early childhood interventions and programs provided through a diverse range of services.

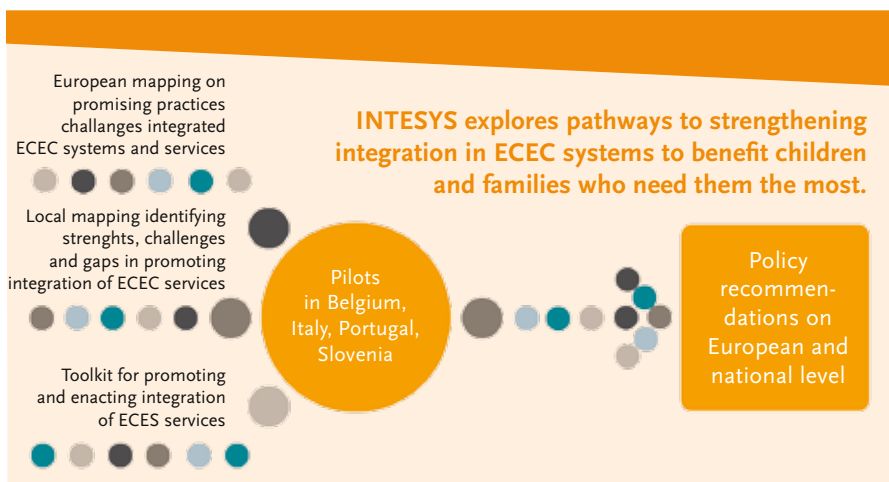


ISSA also acknowledges that, for this age group, a shared understanding of quality is crucial to consistently address a child's uniqueness and very specific needs by all service providers across sectors (health, education and social welfare).

Following the success of the publication, we translated the text into Russian and Dutch. Both translations are available on our website.

# INTESYS Together – supporting vulnerable children through integrated early childhood services

Quality integrated Early Childhood Education and Care services are key to improving children's learning outcomes in absolute terms and relative to other groups. For the most disadvantaged groups, high-quality early childhood services can make a tremendous difference in reducing the disparities in the learning outcomes. Currently, inequality in the ECEC systems in Europe has a strong impact on the most vulnerable groups: migrant children, Roma children, children with special needs and children living in poverty.



Starting in 2017, four pilots will take place in Italy, Portugal, Slovenia and Belgium. By 2018 they will be prepared to deliver policy recommendations at both a national and EU level.

Want to read more on building the foundations of integration? Please visit the [website](#) for the reports on ECEC integration in Europe, the local mapping reports and the toolkit.

## EYRA – Early Years Regional Alliance

Created to combat inequality and promote equity and integrated services, the Early Years Regional Alliance is made up of 28 members committed to the values outlined in the EYRA Manifesto. Launched during 2015, the EYRA manifesto was warmly received by members and supporters across the region, and Issa produced this short animated version of the manifesto to engage and entertain.



# Supporting an Empowered Workforce in Early Childhood Services

In conjunction with the Results for Development, ISSA launched the [Early Childhood Workforce Initiative website](#).

The initiative takes a holistic, multi-sectoral approach to bridge gaps in policy and practice and promote high quality, equitable services focusing on the country system and policy level to support and to empower those who work with families and children under age 8. This includes home visitors, preschool staff, community health workers, as well as those who supervise and mentor practitioners.

In June, the initiative held the first in a series of webinars on the early childhood workforce, tackling the subject [Diversity and identity - the early childhood workforce](#). More webinars are planned for 2017.

Over the course of the year we also welcomed support from the Jacobs Foundation and the Elma Foundation. The initiative is realized with the support of Open Society Foundations and the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

## THE INITIATIVE'S THEMATIC AREAS ARE:

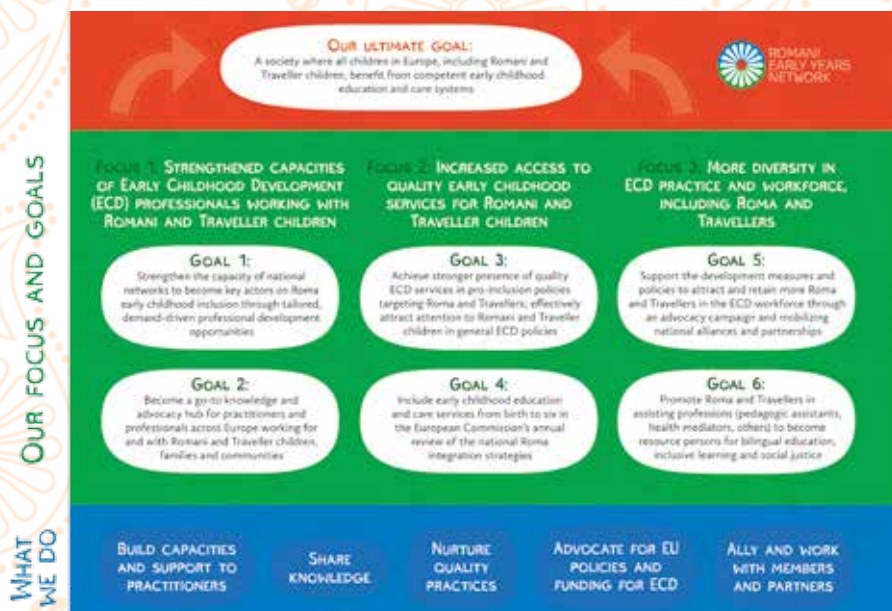
- *Competencies and Standards*
- *Training and Professional Development*
- *Monitoring and Mentoring*
- *Recognition of the Profession*



# Romani Early Years Network (REYN)

## – Development of a new strategy for 2017-2020

2016 has been the year in which a new four year strategy for the Romani Early years network was developed. REYN broadened its scope and strengthened its focus on advocacy.



### The three strategic focus areas include:

1. Strengthened **capacities** of ECD professionals working with Romani and Traveller children, especially of those from Romani and Traveller background;
2. Increased access to **quality** early childhood services for the Romani and Traveller children;
3. More **diversity** in ECD practice and workforce, including Roma and Travellers.



The strategy introduced several changes in the network, including the shift from individual membership to involvement of organizations as partners. You can read the final [strategy](#) on our REYN [blog](#).

## REYN Strategy – Consultation Meeting, October 26, 2016, Leiden (Netherlands)

Twenty-five representatives working on Roma issues got together to discuss priorities in Roma early years inclusion and explored avenues for stronger cooperation within the framework of the new Strategy 2017-2020. These were representatives of national REYNs and their members, ISSA, networks of Roma NGOs and early childhood NGOs, funders and other partners. The Strategy reflects a co-constructed pathway for REYN to move forward.

## Roma Early Childhood Inclusion – advocacy and new publications

Within the ISSA-[Bernard van Leer Foundation](#) (BvLF) three year partnership on strengthening the capacity of local partners to implement Roma inclusion projects, ISSA developed three case studies on the projects in Belgium, Ireland and Italy. A synthesis report was written with policy recommendations at the European and country level.



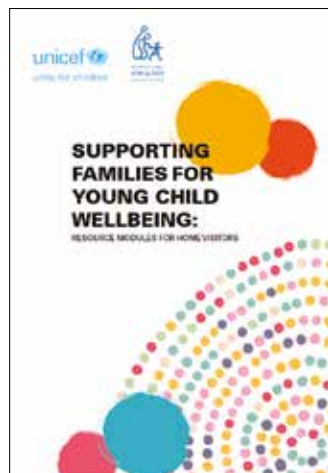
To download the reports, visit the [website](#)

Building on the rich lessons from the three case studies, in partnership with BvLF, ISSA organized a policy roundtable on ***Lessons learned, steps to make in achieving the inclusion of Roma and Traveller young children and families*** in Brussels. Together with partners and organizations running and supporting programs targeting young Romani and Traveller children and their families, the roundtable focused on developing policy recommendations at the European level to be used in future programming for higher impact and increased sustainability.

## Strengthening the Capacity of Home Visitors

In line with ISSA's Strategic Goal to "increase the awareness of the importance of early childhood development and of a qualified workforce", ISSA partnered with UNICEF to develop the series Resource Modules for Home Visitors.

The modules were created through a consultative process involving international and regional experts, national trainers and home visiting professionals. The resource package has been used to train master trainers in 14 countries and can be adapted to country contexts to train service providers.



In November, 2016 ISSA's Senior Program Manager traveled to Turkmenistan to deliver a four-day Training of Trainers organized around three core module topics.

The [modules](#) are free to download from ISSA's website. We trust that training courses based on these modules will enable home visitors to develop positive, respectful and sensitive relationships with parents, empowering them to make informed decisions and take positive action with regard to the development and all-round wellbeing of their young children.



## A Treasure of Parenting Resources

The partners of the Early Years Regional Alliance share a common vision: a society in which Early Childhood Education and Care stands at the core of its development, where children are prioritized, respected and encouraged. In 2016, together with UNICEF, we created a database of resources easy to access by those who develop, implement and evaluate parenting programs. A [rich database](#) of downloadable files recommended articles, websites and training ideas can be found on [EYRA](#) website. We support and advocate for strong and positive relationships between parents and young children.





**MEET THE SECRETARIAT AND BOARD**







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**Vesna Bajsanski-Agic**  
Board Member  
Mozaik Foundation  
Bosnia and  
Herzegovina

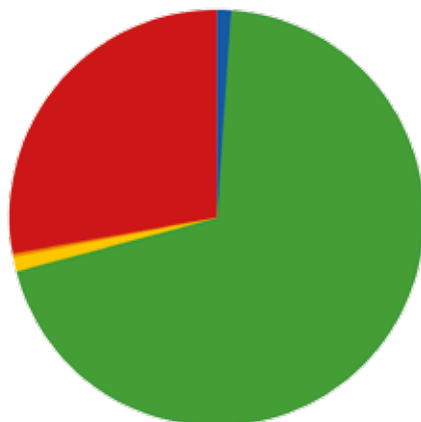







**Sarah Klaus**  
Open Society  
Foundations  
Representative  
United Kingdom



**FINANCES**

## BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2016 INTERNATIONAL STEP BY STEP ASSOCIATION



	2016 €	2015 €
 Liquid funds	532.498	1.174.276
 Debtors	6.723	40.604
 Other receivables	23.720	8.565
 Grants receivable	1.350.284	1.505.116
 Tangible Fixed Assets	23.105	28.724
Loan	—	8.851
	<b>1.936.330</b>	<b>2.766.136</b>

*The balance sheet and the income statement are derived from the annual report audited by Kreston Syncount B. V.*







# BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2016

## INTERNATIONAL STEP BY STEP ASSOCIATION

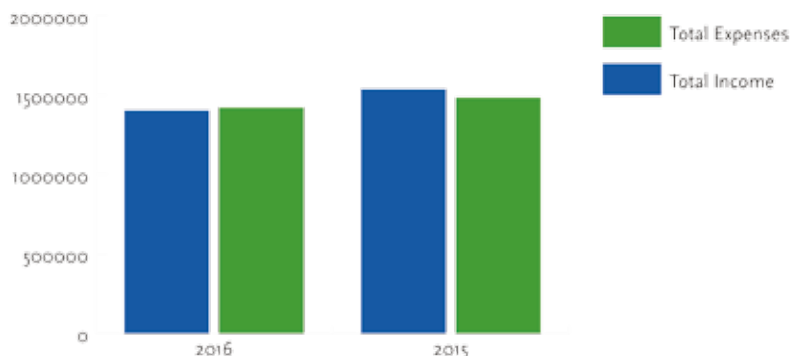
(after allocation of net result)



	2016 €	2015 €
 Creditors and accrued expenses	133.113	765.124
 Taxes payable	15.567	41.899
 Deferred revenue	1.616.652	1.777.527
 Association capital reserve	170.998	181.586
	<b>1.936.330</b>	<b>2.766.136</b>

*The balance sheet and the income statement are derived from the annual report audited by Kreston Synccount B. V.*

# STATEMENT OF INCOME AND EXPENSES FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2016 INTERNATIONAL STEP BY STEP ASSOCIATION



	2016 €	2015 €
Grants	1.258.421	1.499.367
Membership fees	23.672	17.809
Sales and other income	123.646	22.294
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>1.405.740</b>	<b>1.539.470</b>
Administration	216.030	170.759
Programs	652.531	1.125.577
Fundraising and partnership building	67.068	8.383
Income generation	172.413	5.506
Consultative Group	316.366	176.785
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>1.424.408</b>	<b>1.487.010</b>
Net operating income	-18.668	52.460
Interest income	633	805
Exchange differences	7.447	-2.491
<b>Result</b>	<b>-10.588</b>	<b>50.774</b>
Funds reserved for Association capital reserve	-10.588	50.774

*The balance sheet and the income statement are derived from  
the annual report audited by Kreston Syncount B. V.*



**SUPPORTERS**

# ISSA'S SUPPORTERS



## ISSA

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[www.issa.nl](http://www.issa.nl)



# LOOKING AHEAD

**Pursuing its strategic goals, in 2017 ISSA will primarily focus on:**

- Strengthening the learning about and among its members and growing its membership
- Building strategic partnerships for advocacy purposes
- Increasing its impact on country level
- Increasing its role as an ECD regional network on the global level
- Creating impactful resources on quality, equitable and integrated ECD systems
- Searching for innovative communications and learning tools and developing a new website and a new online community for its members

## **Photo Credits**

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