



Annual Report

2013



INTERNATIONAL
STEP by STEP
ASSOCIATION

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I. INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL OVERVIEW

In 2012, ISSA went through a strategic planning process for developing its new three year strategy. As stated in its core document which resulted from this process, the main strategic impulse in the **2013-2015 Strategy** will be one of **GROWTH and DEPTH**. The growth and depth will be reached through ISSA's programmatic and network pillars.

In the framework of the 2013-2015 Strategy, through its **three programmatic pillars**, ISSA will:

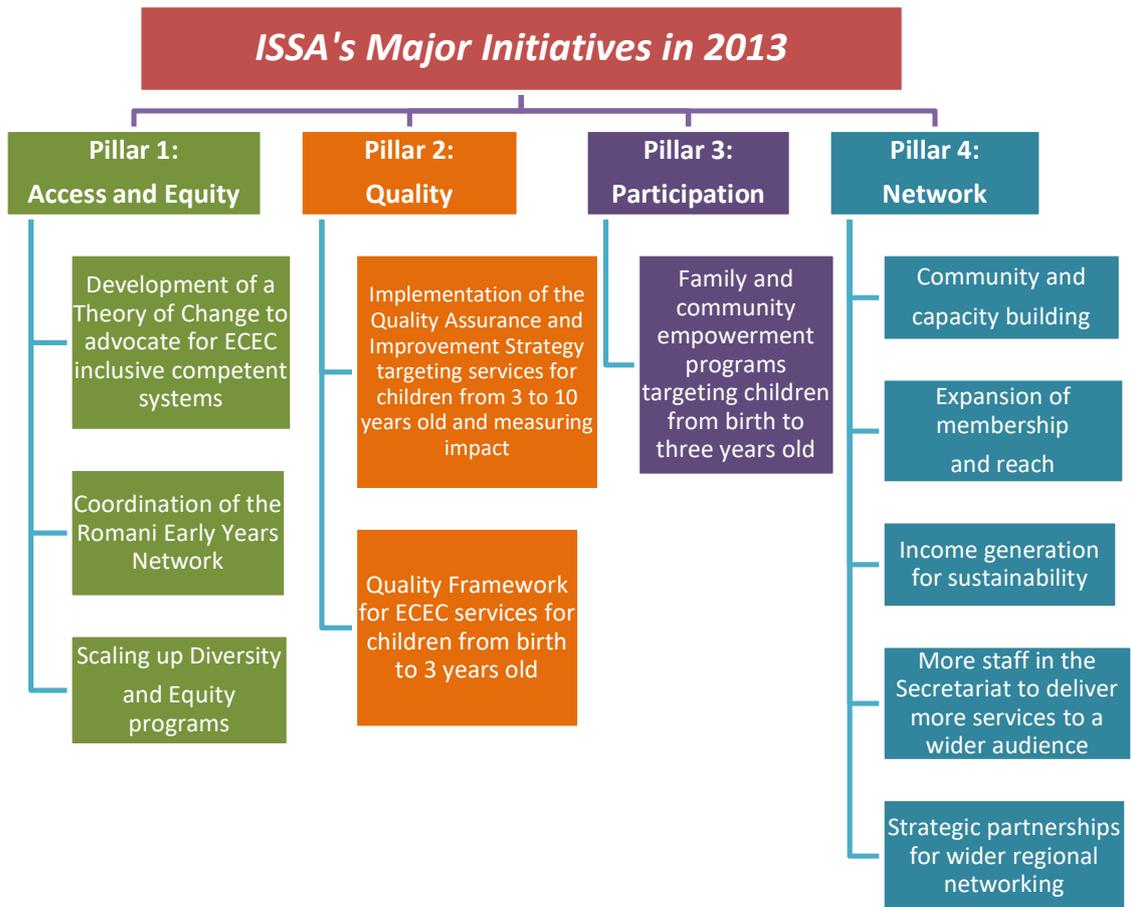
- introduce a stronger drive towards impact in the lives of children by using the network's resources and expertise in the area of Quality, Equity and Diversity.
- expand its programs on Quality in ECD by adding a new focus on the quality of programs targeting children from birth to three years of age.
- reach out to broader audiences by providing professional development opportunities (including more online courses) to more ECD practitioners beyond the education sector.
- document the impact of implementing programs targeting quality and of the quality of professional development services for the ECEC workforce.
- develop and work with a theory of change for ECEC systems, in order to advocate for competent inclusive systems in the region.
- support a Romani Early Years Network with the aim to make the work force in ECD services reflect and respond to the diversity present in the Roma communities they serve, as well as to empower and promote ECD professionals of Roma origin.

In the framework of the 2013-2015 Strategy, through its **network pillar**, ISSA will:

- pursue growth through expanding ISSA's constituency and thus the association's reach and impact, by recruiting new Full and Affiliate Members around thematic areas linked with the three programmatic pillars.
- engage with more practitioners, who will join as Friends of ISSA or as participants in the online courses and the thematic networks hosted ISSA.
- build further capacity in the network to work with online tools for collaboration and information sharing.
- strengthen partnerships for maximizing impact, for representing broader views from the CEE/CIS region and for developing ISSA into an expanding learning community for the benefit of young children.
- find different ways to generate unrestricted funds for building financial sustainability and for being able to continue to provide subsidized services to ISSA members.

Through **all four pillars** ISSA will seek to position itself more firmly in the regional and international ECD landscape, building on the diversity and strengths of the network, as well as the reputation the association has as promoter of access, equity and quality of ECD services.

During 2013, which was the first year of the new strategy, ISSA pursued the following key initiatives:



This report presents the main achievements and challenges under each initiative during 2013.

II. MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN 2013

ISSA's work in 2013 is carried out within the framework of its Work Plan 2013, with two grants from the Open Society Foundations (OSF) and five contracts from non-OSF sources. The Work Plan includes a number of new initiatives and some which started in 2012, and were rolled over into 2013 (especially under Goal II).

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

Overview of Progress under Pillar I

The main focus of ISSA's work under this pillar revolves around three major initiatives each of them contributing to the promotion of access and equity in ISSA regions.

- 1. Developing and launching an ECD advocacy platform for Europe and Central Asia to advocate for competent inclusive ECD systems, grounded in a theory of change*
- 2. Coordination of the Romani Early Years Network*
- 3. Scaling up Diversity and Equity programs*

Objectives:

- 1. Develop and work with a comprehensive theory of change for ECEC systems to advocate for competent inclusive systems in Europe and Central Asia.*
- 2. Consolidate ISSA's position in the region by contributing to the ECD field with innovative programs and initiatives that promote equity and diversity in ECEC services, reaching out to broad audiences.*
- 3. Establish and coordinate a network for Romani and other ECD practitioners working with Roma children and families that will offer opportunities to develop their competences for improving the quality and equity of early childhood services targeting Roma children and their families.*

1. Early Years Regional Alliance (EYRA) and the development of a Theory of Change for Inclusive ECD systems

ISSA was successful in obtaining a one year grant from the World Bank via the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development to set-up the **Early Years Regional Alliance (EYRA)** for Europe and Central Asia (ECA). Building on ISSA's partnership with the Open Society Foundations, UNICEF and Save the Children International and aiming to attract new partners, the Alliance is envisaged as a forum for improved coordination among development partners to advocate vigorously for the advancement of the early childhood agenda at the regional and national levels. This is one of the most important achievements for ISSA in 2013, with great potential for strengthening ISSA's mandate, as a wider ECD umbrella for ECA.

The main objectives of the Alliance are:

- Establish EYRA as a regionally and internationally recognized advocate for the rights of young children (0-8 years) in ECA
- Develop key messages that reflect the vision, mission and evidence-based recommendations of EYRA and share these with key stakeholders in ECA countries
- Share knowledge products, best practices and lessons learnt and support their dissemination in the region through online tools and via other networks, in order to influence policy.

1.1. Main achievements

- Within the project, ISSA established a strong partnership with OSF, UNICEF and Save the Children International, organizing two **Steering Committee Meetings**: one in January in Prishtina/Kosovo (organized around another meeting where the founding partners were attending) and another meeting in June in Leiden/Holland. A Plan of Action was developed for 2013, with tasks divided among partners, including plans for recruitment of new members and mapping their needs and profiles.
- In the first half of the year, a **Letter of Invitation** and a **Survey** were developed and sent to approximately 30 organizations, identified by partners as potential members of the Alliance. A Survey Report with answers provided by 20 organizations was prepared during the autumn (see Annex I). The survey collected information on the potential members' current advocacy work, their experience in advocacy and the expectations they would have from the Alliance. Given the very positive feedback received in terms of the respondents' interest to join this initiative and their desire to join forces around common goals, further efforts continued in the last months of the year for attracting new partners.
- Two **capacity building activities** were conducted, aiming at strengthening EYRA's mandate and plans for implementing advocacy initiatives:
 1. Bringing together 25 participants, a **Workshop on Theory of Change and Advocacy** was organized on June 13-14, 2013, in the Child Rights Home in Leiden/The Netherlands, with two major goals:
 - a. To lay the foundations for developing a Theory of Change – a framework for the Alliance's advocacy program, that aims at having ***inclusive early childhood systems*** in Europe and Central Asia.
 - b. To build capacity among the Alliance members on how to develop Theories of Change (ToC) and how these are linked to lobby and advocacy work.
 2. A capacity building **Workshop on Advocacy** was organized for 30 participants, representing organizations which expressed their interest in EYRA and ISSA members, with the aim to strengthen their knowledge and skills in developing and implementing advocacy initiatives on the local and regional level. The workshop was organized in Istanbul between 4-7 November 2013, and was successfully facilitated by Radmila Rangelov Jusovic, from ISSA's member organization in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The workshop also provided the opportunity for EYRA founding partners and interested organizations to set a common ground of understanding around EYRA's role and opportunities for cooperation in advocacy initiatives on regional level.
- **Recruitment:** By the end of 2014 the Founding Partners aimed to recruit approximately 25 members. In 2013, EYRA collected 29 expressions of interest from organizations to join the alliance. In addition to the members of the Alliance, certain actions will engage other stakeholders as partners or as target audience for advocacy campaigns and information sharing. The Founding Members began developing a database of (potential) members, as well as a database of the broader target audience. Efforts for recruitment were intense in the first half of the year and continued in the second half of the year.. Judging by the responses from stakeholders, the Alliance has a great potential to become one of ISSA's most prominent initiatives in the coming years and support substantially the other initiatives under the three programmatic Pillars.
- **A promotional material** of EYRA (a bookmark) was developed and distributed during the Regional Ministerial Education Conference organized by the Ministry of Education in Turkey and UNICEF in December 2013, where the Founding Partners of the Alliance attended. A large audience of ministry representatives and representatives of local governmental and non-governmental agencies were

introduced to EYRA through a presentation included in the conference program, thus expanding the efforts to announce the launch of EYRA.

- A **mid-term and a final report** were submitted to the donor in the beginning of July and the beginning of January and they were successfully approved.
- New **funding** is being negotiated with the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development to continue EYRA's activity in 2014.

1.2. Challenges

The establishment of the Alliance is a challenging process in itself, given its large constituency and the aims envisaged for it. During the workshop and in discussions with stakeholders and Founding Partners, the following issues have been identified as challenges to be tackled:

- Articulating a clear vision and a Call for Action: An important step not yet achieved is to clearly articulate the mission of EYRA and to develop a Manifesto, embraced by all partners.
- Development of the Theory of Change for EYRA: Given the need for a generic Theory of Change, this is a very challenging task for ISSA.
- Developing a strong brand/image: Explore ways and means for obtaining the legitimacy to voice wide ECD concerns in ECA (e.g. via broad membership representing different sectors etc.).
- Positioning on the international and regional scene: Define relationships with other Alliances in the region and beyond. Identify what makes EYRA different and how it is compatible with other networks and Alliances.
- Sustainability and motivation: How to make EYRA inspirational and sustainable? From the perspective of future members, the Alliance is a good initiative, which can enhance the effects of their individual advocacy activities. Support from the Alliance to national organizations will be very beneficial.

Partners: Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development, OSF, UNICEF, Save the Children

2. Romani Early Years Network (REYN)

Launched in October 2012, in partnership with OSF's Early Childhood Programme, the Romani Early Years Network (REYN) is a network hosted and managed by ISSA, focusing on emerging and established Romani early childhood development professionals, as well as other professionals working in the field of ECD with Roma communities. Its main purpose is to develop skills and good practice, establish effective partnerships and support professional development.

Its general objectives are:

1. Build a strong inclusive professional learning community among Romani and other ECD practitioners working with Romani children, within which they can develop skills, partnerships, resources, methodologies, etc.
2. Promote equality and access for Romani and other ECD practitioners to professional development pathways
3. Provide Roma and other ECD practitioners with high quality professional development opportunities
4. Increase Roma and others ECD practitioners' reputation and visibility on the international/regional/local level in working towards improving the quality and equity of ECD provisions

5. Strengthen the capacity of the network to advocate for inclusive policies and practices on the transnational and national level

2.1. Main achievements

Membership:

- At the end of 2013, REYN's Membership includes 281 **members registered on the REYN Blog** since the launch of the network in 2012 in Opatija/Croatia and 680 **members on the REYN Facebook page**. Since launched, the design of the Blog has been improved so that it better reflects the visual identity of REYN and is more user-friendly. By the end of December 2013, more than 70 posts have been placed on the Blog. In April, both current REYN members and ISSA's Full members were contacted by the ISSA Secretariat with a request to help recruit new members. A letter targeting new members was shared and as an outcome approximately 30 new members joined the network.
- Promotional materials for **membership recruitment**: In order to make the network known to potential members, the following materials were produced and disseminated: **Join REYN Leaflet** - out of 2000 copies, 1500 copies were distributed, and **REYN pins** - out of 3000 REYN Pins, approximately 1500 were distributed during several professional events during the year. After each event the ISSA Secretariat received requests and new members were registered on the Blog and the ISSA Online Community. A video material about the REYN Study Visit to Slovenia was developed and posted on the REYN Blog and REYN Facebook (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5NRcO8sChm0>).
- Some of the events where REYN promotional materials were disseminated included:
 - RECI+ Initiative Meeting in Prishtina/Kosovo (January 2013) where discussions were held also about setting up a national REYN in Kosovo
 - Closing conference of the European Commission funded Project "Roma Families Get Involved" organized by Fundacion Secretariado Gitano in Brussels (March 2013). The conference focused on the topic of Roma family involvement in educational programs
 - Advocacy Alliance/Theory of Change workshop in Leiden (June 2013), organized by ISSA under the partnership project funded by the Consultative Group on ECCD, where more than 25 organizations participated
 - The Traveller and Romani Early Years Network launch in Dublin (June 2013) in association with the Policy Forum and Conference hosted by EDeNn, the Irish Equality and Diversity Early Childhood National Network (www.edenn.org).
 - Université d'été en études Romani, 2nd edition (July 2013), organised by the Romani Academy of Sciences and Regards de Femmes Tsiganes in partnership with IUFM de L'Academie de Lyon, Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1. The event was supported by the Open Society Foundations Roma Initiatives Office and the Council of Europe.
 - UNESCO meeting *Through Teachers and Mothers to Roma and other Disadvantaged Children: Focus on Quality Pre-school Education*, Bratislava (September 2013)
 - IAIE Conference *Unity and Disunity, Connections and Separations: Intercultural education as a movement for promoting multiple identities, social inclusion and transformation*, Zagreb (September 2013)
 - REYN Study visit to Romania, Telechiu (October 2013)
 - REYN Training in Budapest (November 2013)
 - REYN study visit to Slovenia, Murska Sobota (December 2013)
 - The Regional Ministerial Education Conference: *Including all children in quality learning*. (December 2013)

- **A discounted ISSA membership fee** is offered to Roma NGOs, whose staff are REYN members. These NGOs may apply for a discounted annual membership fee of 150 EUR/year. An announcement of this opportunity was included in various promotional messages during the year.

National Networks:

- **National networks** have been initiated in Kosovo, Ireland, Slovenia and in Hungary. ISSA's members in Slovakia and Croatia are also on the way of setting up a national network. ISSA Member NGOs are the leading organizations for establishing the REYN national networks in all these countries, with the exception of Ireland, where a DECET member took the lead.
- The Slovenian REYN Network started a group in Slovenian on the ISSA Online Community: (<http://www.issa.nl/oc/index.php/groups/viewgroup/28-Romani+Early+Years+Network+Slovenia.html>).
- The Hungarian network communicates through a Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/groups/469006546524453/?notif_t=group_r2j

Communications:

- The first electronic **REYN Newsletter** was developed during April-May and disseminated in June, via different channels within REYN and to the wider ISSA network. The online monitoring tool linked with the REYN Blog shows the following results: out of 477 recipients (REYN Blog members and potential members from the REYN Database 134 opened it, a 28.4% rate. The top locations from where the newsletter was opened are: the UK (26%), USA (9.4%), Romania (7.3%), Macedonia (5.6 %), and Bulgaria (1%). The REYN Newsletter is available from this link: (<http://us7.campaign-archive1.com/?u=c2587a4d453365adcb79d8147&id=1a665b0c67&e=978af99892>)
- The reyn@issa.nl mailing list has been set up with the purpose of sharing information with REYN members; the email list includes all REYN members registered on the Blog.
- All opportunities for professional development available during 2013 were announced via various communication tools.

Advisory Group:

- **The REYN Advisory Group (AG)** was set up in May 2013, following a process of nominations from the REYN members. The REYN Advisory Group is a consultative body composed of 4 persons nominated by REYN members and selected by a Committee representing ISSA and OSF/ECP.
- Two **Advisory Group Meetings** were held in 2013, the first one in early July, where productive discussions and reflections were shared related to REYN communications, membership strategy and professional development activities in 2013. All Advisory Group members viewed as REYN Ambassadors received promotional materials to be distributed to their partners. The second REYN Advisory Group meeting was held in November, and all members played an important role during the REYN Training in Budapest, which was organized right after the meeting. Besides the active participation in the training, AG members organized small group and individual discussions with REYN members, consulting them on the Manifesto and their vision for REYN.

Manifesto

- The first draft of the **REYN Manifesto** was developed by the Advisory Group in July and consultations with REYN members on the content of the Manifesto were initiated. The document was developed during the first meeting of the Advisory Group and disseminated by the Advisory Group members through the REYN Blog (<http://reyn.blog.issa.nl/manifesto-of-the-romani-early-years-network-no-more-lost-romani-traveller-generations/>), REYN Facebook page, the REYN Group

on the ISSA Online Community. Consultations continued also during the two study visits and two trainings. The final version is finalized and ready to be posted. The document aims to express the networks' values, beliefs and commitments which will guide further the activity of REYN.

REYN Professional Development Activities in 2013

- **Four capacity building activities were successfully conducted in 2013**, following the agreed plan of the Advisory Group Meeting. Procedures for selecting sites and participants for the REYN professional development activities were developed and the REYN Coordinator, AG members and ISSA's Program Director participated in selection process using evaluation forms for applicants.

The activities included:

- Thematic study visit on: *Integrated Community Based Approach to Early Childhood Services in Romani Communities* – Host organization: Ruhama Foundation (Romania, Telechiu - October 2013)
- Trainings on *Quality in Early Childhood Services*: Two trainings were delivered in parallel in two languages (English and Serbian) by Mihaela Ionescu, ISSA Program Director and Zorica Trikić, ISSA Senior Program Manager and REYN Coordinator (Budapest, Hungary - November 2013)
- Thematic study visit on *High Quality and Culturally Sensitive Early Childhood Education Services* – Host Organization: Educational Research Institute, Center for Pedagogical Initiatives Step by Step (Slovenia, Murska Sobota - December 2013)

In total 106 REYN members applied for these REYN professional development activities:

- 68 applications for the two trainings in Serbian and English language;
- 19 applications for the study visit to Romania
- 19 applications for the study visit to Slovenia.

After the selection, 54 participants benefitted from the REYN trainings and 24 members from the REYN study visits (11 in Romania and 13 in Slovenia).

During study visits video materials were developed and a video clip on study visit to Slovenia is available on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5NRcO8sChm0>.

The majority of participants in REYN professional development activities rated them as excellent (both in content and organizational part).

- A draft **advocacy strategy** for REYN was developed with input from Andor Urmos, AG member.
- **The Embracing Diversity Online Course** (see below) was launched with UNESCO co-funding under the REYN umbrella, giving REYN participants the opportunity to benefit also from online education.

Fundraising

- Preliminary discussions were held with UNICEF and the Bernard van Leer Foundation for **co-funding** some of the activities to be conducted within REYN in the future.

2.2 Challenges

- The development of the network was strongly linked to hiring a REYN Program Manager. The process started in the beginning of the year: 35 candidates submitted their applications, and after shortlisting them to three and conducting in-person interviews in the Budapest office in March, the offer was rejected by the selected candidate in April. Not having a REYN Program Manager caused delays in articulating better a plan for membership enlargement, increasing members' engagement on the online platforms and in general in implementing the 2013 plan. Some of the capacity building

activities were postponed till the first months of 2014. From June 2013. Senior Program Manager started to work as REYN Coordinator.

- The language of communication in the network (English) proves to be a big challenge, since not all practitioners who could potentially benefit from joining REYN are fluent. For overcoming it and in order to provide more members the opportunity to apply and participate in professional development activities, some of the events were held in two languages. The emerging national networks also aim to address the challenge of finding common languages for communication.
- It is challenging to motivate REYN members to communicate via the REYN blog, since many lack the confidence to express themselves in writing in English via such a channel.

Partner: OSF, UNESCO

3. Embracing Diversity

The *Embracing Diversity* initiative builds on the continuous OSF financial support for the long-term partnership between CIP-Center for Interactive Pedagogy and ISSA, and on the Education for Social Justice Program developed throughout the last 10 years, which focused on building the capacity of professionals to work towards inclusive services, community empowerment, bias-free and anti-discrimination environments for children, families and communities. The initiative under the ISSA 2013-2015 Strategy aims at scaling-up Embracing Diversity programs by expanding the target audience to different categories of professionals and by diversifying the means for reaching out to a larger audience, mainly by developing online courses promoting diversity. Due to a new partnership with UNICEF and a successful application for one year funding from UNESCO, which is added to OSF's continuous support in this field, this initiative started successfully in 2013.

3.1. Main achievements

- **Online Course on Embracing Diversity**
 - **Two versions of the online course Embracing Diversity** were developed: one targeting various professionals working in multicultural environments (not necessarily teachers) - in English; one targeting specifically preschool teachers working with Romani children and families - in Serbian and English. Both versions, consisting of 6 modules, were developed by Dawn Tankersley, ISSA Program Specialist and Zorica Trikic, ISSA Senior Program Manager.
 - The recruitment of participants for the online course in Serbian was carried out with successful results. A flyer for recruitment in Serbian was developed and 57 applications from 6 countries were received.
 - The Embracing Diversity online course for preschool teachers working with Romani children and families in Serbian language started to be piloted in May 2013 with **35 participants from six countries** (8 from Macedonia; 11 from Serbia; 8 from Bosnia-Herzegovina; 2 from Slovenia and 1 from Montenegro) working with approximately **1000 children**, age from 3 to 7, including approximately **500 Roma children**. Two moderators guided the participants: Jelena Vranjesevic, Professor at Belgrade University and Zorica Trikic, ISSA Senior Program Manager.
 - Manuals for participants and for online course moderators were developed.
 - Feedback was collected via evaluation forms and participants expressed their satisfaction with the course content.

- Valuable lessons were learned (e.g. it is necessary to acquire commitment from participants - if they apply and they are selected they have to make a commitment that they will finish the course; it is necessary to create simpler and shorter modules etc.)
 - Work began on a module on Diversity in the new partnership initiative with UNICEF: the Training Package for Home Visitors (see below).
- **In-person training on Embracing Diversity delivered to new audiences**
 - Upon request, the training *Embracing Diversity - Creating Equitable Societies through Personal Transformation* was delivered to the UNICEF staff in Bulgaria in November 2013, in Borovec. The entire staff of the UNICEF office in Bulgaria (including external consultants) took part in the training, in total 21 persons. The ISSA trainers were Zorica Trikić, ISSA Senior Program Manager and Dr. Jelena Vranjesević, Belgrade University, ISSA Consultant. The evaluations indicated that the training was very successful, with 52% of participants rating it as excellent and 38% as good. All participants (100%) stated that they would recommend the training to other organizations. Based on this successful pilot, ISSA will continue discussions with the UNICEF Regional Office to explore opportunities for further trainings.
 - Trainings on *Embracing Diversity* are also being planned for REYN members – to be delivered in 2014.
 - **New promotional materials for ISSA's services for capacity building on Embracing Diversity**
 - A new leaflet advertising ISSA's resources on Diversity was produced in September and started to be disseminated in the autumn during ISSA events and among partners. http://www.issa.nl/docs_pdfs/ISSA%20Resources%20and%20Training%20on%20Diversity.pdf

3.2. Challenges

- Successful development of online courses depends on technical support: preparing the course online platform, uploading the content of the modules, uploading all resources linked with the content of the modules, uploading the manuals for participants, registering all participants and making them become active members of the learning community of the course. The translation and uploading of all content in Serbian language has taken more time than envisaged, as well as the registration of participants.
- It was challenging to keep all participants active in the course. In spite of intense efforts (regular communication, additional support etc.) the moderators were not able to motivate some participants to rejoin the course after dropping out. Reasons for drop out were different: issues with online platform (e.g. logging in and staying logged-in, posting); the content of the course was too challenging; language challenges (for participants from Macedonia and Slovenia); personal/professional issues preventing participants to engage on regular basis; need for a more individualized approach; low quality of participants' internet connection preventing participants from downloading all materials or staying connected for long, etc.
- It was challenging to facilitate two parallel learning processes with the participants – gaining new knowledge and skills on working in contexts of diversity and learning about how to participate in e-learning and use online tools.

Partner: OSF, UNESCO, UNICEF

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

Overview of Progress under Pillar II

The main focus of ISSA's work under this Pillar is on the implementation of activities from the Quality Assurance and Improvement Strategy (QAIS) for 2013 and achievement of the additional objectives from the 2013-2015 Strategy under Pillar 2.

Objectives:

1. Promote and keep as a priority the quality of early childhood education practices in the ISSA network
2. Continuously work towards shared understanding of quality practices in the ISSA network and at the local/national level
3. Support members in developing a quality implementation strategy by using the new resources in the QRP at the local level
4. Monitor the progress of implementing the QRP and document work around Quality on the level of the ISSA network
5. Assess the impact of using the ISSA resources on Quality in the network
6. Develop a quality framework for ECEC services for children from birth to three years of age
7. Promote dialogue on the quality and effectiveness of early childhood professional development

1. Main achievements

- Three **leaflets advocating for quality** were finalized. The leaflets, targeting different audiences - decision makers, parents, educators – were developed during the year and printed out in November. ISSA distributed them to members in December and to other partners during the Advocacy workshop in Istanbul (under EYRA) and during other meetings. The leaflets are meant to serve as advocacy tools that accompany and promote the ISSA resources on Quality, to empower different stakeholders to advocate for the quality of early childhood services in their countries. The leaflets have been made available to ISSA members in a pdf format; members have been provided with the possibility of translating them and adapting them to their local context using the already existing layout.
- A study commissioned by the European Commission's DG Education and Culture included a **case study** exploring the work of the ISSA network and of the Open Society Foundations: *OSF/ISSA Approaches to Teacher Training and Pedagogy*. The case study was written by Dawn Tankersley (ISSA Program Specialist) and Sarah Klaus (Director, Early Childhood Program, Open Society Foundations) and makes reference to the ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy (http://www.issa.nl/news_early_childhood_education.html)
- **15 Reliability Meetings were organized** in 2013 (in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Montenegro, Macedonia, Russia, Slovakia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan) adding to the 11 from last year, a total of 26. On the network level, the total **number of local experts/professionals that reached the 85% reliability threshold is 45 out of 75 who participated in the process**. With very few exceptions, the meetings were very successful and were highly appreciated by the hosting organizations. They gave a strong impetus to more activities to be organized on the local level for extending reliability and thus working with the Professional Development Tools and the Assessment Instrument.

- Two new cohorts of practitioners were offered the **online course** „Teachers that Make a Difference” one in English and one in Spanish. The course was advertised widely through the network of ISSA’s members and partners and in the IBM global community. There was high interest from applicants from different parts of the world. By February 2013, ISSA received: 91 applicants for the course in English and 334 applicants for the course in Spanish. During March 2013, for the course in English ISSA selected **35 participants from 19 countries** - 18 of these participants have an IBM affiliation. For the course in Spanish ISSA selected **36 participants from 7 countries** - 11 of these participants have an IBM affiliation. ISSA also selected 6 observers to follow the course in English and 1 observer for the course in Spanish – practitioners who do not work directly with children, and therefore could not carry out the practical assignments required by the course. A **mid-term report** and a **final report** were submitted to the donor in the beginning of July and at the end of 2013. Staff and trainers from ISSA members were invited to be involved in the online course so that they can be coached on how to moderate online courses. Although more expressed interest, only one NGO took this opportunity.

- **The Quality Portfolio** was finalized in the spring of 2013 and is accessible online through the ISSA Online Community (<http://issa.nl/e-portfolios/quality/>) with restricted access provided only to ISSA licensed members. The structure of the Portfolio was developed via consultations with the members of the Program Committee, based on suggestions made by ISSA Members during the discussions in the Council Meeting in October 2012. The main aim of this tool is to develop both an NGO individual portfolio and a network portfolio on quality, documenting the members’ efforts for quality improvement of early childhood services in their countries using the resources in the Quality Resource Pack. The Portfolio contains both qualitative and quantitative data regarding the work of the entire network. In December, the Portfolio was introduced to members in the framework of the discussion around the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan for the ISSA 2013-2015 Strategic Plan and since then members started uploading information about their organization’s work. By the time the report was developed, 9 organizations uploaded quantitative and qualitative information.

- The necessary data to reach a significant sample for validating the **Assessment Instrument** (AI) was collected until July 2013 through the work of the Reliability Coordinators. A total of 90 observations were conducted in 13 countries. The first draft of the **research report** was finalized in September and lead to the validation of the AI. A complete methodology for using the instrument and for collecting the data in a new database was developed with the purpose of:
 - Assisting members to ground their work with practitioners/services on collecting data from observations which may inform the development of targeted and tailored professional development plans on individual and collective level.
 - Development of an international database which will lead to the collection of multiple country data which will help in the improvement of the Instrument.

- For nurturing the licensed members’ initiatives and opportunities for the development of their work around quality, a decision was made in the Program Committee to organize a capacity building workshop focusing on Pillar 2 and the Quality Assurance and Improvement Strategy, for those members that are interested and also those that applied for Technical Assistance under Pillar 2. The **Quality Workshop** was held in December in Leiden focusing on:
 - new developments/resources regarding the Quality Resource Pack (QRP): a new methodology for the AI, a database for collecting data from observations using the AI, a new guidebook on the multipurpose use of the resources in the QRP to be used by members when promoting the package to governments and other donors – the guidebook will include also contributions from members (e.g. Sanja Brajkovic’s book on working on quality in

- professional learning communities and Gerda Sula's results on the PhD research on professional development where she used the resources in the QRP).
- exchange of members' experiences in working with the resources in the QRP
 - introducing a new method – the Wanda method – for working with practitioners around quality issues by having ISSA involved in a partnership project with Artevelde University College and VBJK (Gent) funded with European Social Funds in Belgium (see below).
- 24 licensed members attended this successful workshop: members were enthusiastic about the new resources, about opportunities for further developing their work and for cooperation.
- Under the initiative for developing a **Quality Framework for early childhood services for the youngest children (birth to three)**, an ISSA Task Force composed of experts from 6 ISSA Full Member Organizations with experience and expertise in Birth to Three services has been set-up. The following activities were carried out in 2013 for preparing the work under this initiative:
 - Development of a [Survey Report on Early Childhood Services for Children from Birth to Three and their Families in CEE/CIS](#) based on the survey ran among ISSA Full Members in March 2013. The comprehensive and informative report was widely disseminated among ISSA's Friends and Members via the ISSA Online Community under Network News.
 - In the second half of the year, a desk review research on quality frameworks that exist in different countries for early childhood services for children from birth to three was conducted. The report was finalized in January 2014.

Both the survey report and the desk review research will inform the first meeting in 2014 of the ISSA Task Force and the Advisory Group with external consultants, for starting working on a Quality Framework for services targeting the youngest children and their families.
 - In 2013 ISSA has been approached by several partners to join consortia or work on partnership projects for promoting quality services or to benefit from ISSA's resources on Quality. Two projects were successful in receiving funds and will continue implementation in 2014 and 2015:
 - **Tuscan Approach to Early Childhood Services (TALE)** coordinated by the **Innocenti Institute, Florence/Italy** under the Leonardo da Vinci/Transfer of Innovation Program in Italy. The project involves ISSA members from Bulgaria, Lithuania and Slovenia to pilot the Tuscan approach in early childhood services for children from birth to three in their countries. The project aims at piloting the approach and developing 3 publications with the results of the pilot that will inform a European framework on professionalism in early childhood services. The project started in October 2013 and will end in August 2015.
 - **When Wanda Meets ISSA**, coordinated by **Artevelde University College** in partnership with **VBJK** from Gent on European Social Funds in Belgium. The project focuses on connecting VBJK's Wanda methodology with the ISSA Quality Resource Pack thus putting quality into practice with a comprehensive and integrated methodology. The project will involve ISSA members from Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary, and Slovenia. The project started in October 2013 and will end in August 2015.
 - **The Center for Diversity and Learning** (Steunpunt Diversiteit & Leren) at the University of Ghent/Belgium, through a researcher working on an action research initiated by the King Baudouin Foundation, approached ISSA with the request to access the resources in the Quality Resource Pack. The focus of the research was preparing students in pre-service training to cope with poverty in preschool. A mutual agreement was signed between ISSA and the Center to make the Quality resources available to researchers from the Center for desk research.

2. Challenges

- Finalizing the design and layout of the leaflets advocating for quality took more time than estimated and caused delays in delivering the final products.
- Collecting the videos that were expected to be produced by members who participated in the Thematic Meeting on Documentation in Leiden in 2012. Out of 23 members who took part in the meeting, only 7 members contributed to the video collection.
- Some of the Reliability Meetings encountered challenges:
 - Challenging relationships with government authorities hindered the possibility of conducting observations in both kindergartens and primary schools.
 - Inefficient organization of the meeting by the hosting member in assuring the number of experts to be involved consistently during the entire process (4 days of observations with discussions)
 - Low quality of some of the centers visited made it difficult to assure that the reliability established is an authentic one. Those scores were not considered valid.
 - Finding time to plan the meeting - for the host organization or the Reliability Coordinator.
- Uploading articles on the Online Portfolio on Quality and inserting quantitative data regarding the number of activities and target audience by the ISSA licensed members proves to be a very slow process. Since the Online Portfolio is meant to be a tool for collecting up-to-date data regarding members' activities/projects around quality, it replaces the collection of data through specific sections in the annual survey. Therefore, members' participation to documenting their work within the Portfolio is crucial for ISSA. Given that it is the first time that such a tool is used, it might take time to become a regular tool for documentation and better collection of data will be done in 2014.
- Despite the fact that there was a high number of applications for both online courses, in English and Spanish, the one in English encountered problems in assuring that all participants remain active. Many participants who have not been active mentioned challenges in their own personal and professional life. Some technical problems related to the Joomla online platform caused glitches in registering the applicants and this may have also contributed to their lack of motivation. ISSA will soon switch from Joomla to Drupal, to prevent such technical challenges from occurring in the future. One of the challenges encountered at the beginning of the course was to have all participants begin at the same time and keep the same pace. This was a challenge in the pilot phase of the course as well, and although ISSA tried to address it in the new course, it continues to stay a challenge. The main drawback is that not all the participants are taking part in the same discussions in Forums at the same time, which limits opportunities for sharing. Although a manual was sent to all participants at the beginning, some of them still found it difficult to use the online portal. By adding the Portfolio feature, the online portal became more complicated to use and this discouraged some of the participants.
- The development of the survey report on *Early Childhood Services for Children from Birth to Three and their Families in CEE/CIS* was very time consuming, given the complexity of the data.

Partner: OSF, IBM

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

Overview of Progress under Pillar III

The work under this goal focuses in 2013 primarily on capacity building in the network to implement programs addressing families and communities with a specific focus on families with children under 3 years of age (the most vulnerable and in need)

Objectives:

- Strengthen ISSA members' capacity to deliver family and community empowerment programs targeting children from birth to 3 years old.

1. Main achievements

- As part of a larger initiative to promote the comprehensive wellbeing of children 0-3 years in CEE/CIS, UNICEF's Regional Office and ISSA launched a new partnership project, focused on building human resources capacity in basic services: **Young Child Wellbeing: Improved Child Development and Child Protection Knowledge and Skills of Home Visiting Personnel**. In this project, ISSA was engaged in two main activities:

In partnership with UNICEF and the Institute for Public Health in Serbia, ISSA participated in the development of the document **"Recommendations for Home Visiting Content and Home Visitor Performance for the CEE/CIS Region"** (gold standards).

ISSA is leading the preparation of a core training package which will include **an online learning programme** for home visitors. This modular course will focus on the science of early childhood development, early intervention, parental support, common parenting issues, communication with families, safeguarding children (preventing injuries and maltreatment), attachment, wellbeing of caregivers and young children, working with other sectors, and reaching the most marginalized. The main objective of the course is to enrich the home visitors' knowledge and skills towards a more holistic approach of child development, of parenthood and learning stimulation during the first years of life as well as on how to address equitably the issue of diversity. In CEE/CIS home visiting services are targeting parents, especially mothers, and they are usually focused more on health issues rather than on early stimulation. This is an important step for ISSA to expand its programs towards other sectors and promote an integrated approach to early childhood services. By the time the report was developed, 14 modules were drafted and are ready for review. Through its involvement, by coordinating this initiative, authoring and reviewing some of the modules, developing the ToT for the training package and cooperating with prominent experts in the field of ECD, ISSA will bring visibility and recognition to its expertise and will build new professional connections and partnerships. Once developed, the course as well as the whole training package and other accompanying materials will be made available to members who may develop partnerships with Ministries and other organizations from other sectors to offer the course to professionals working with young children and their families. During 2013, the "gold standards" were developed, the outline of the course, as well 14 modules, under the coordination of the Senior Program Manager.

- In order to strengthen the capacity of the ISSA Secretariat and the ISSA network in general to work more in the birth-three area, the newly hired Senior Program Manager attended an Interagency Workshop to Build Capacity on the Care for Child Development Intervention, organized by UNICEF, WHO and the World Bank, in Ankara in June 2013. The **Care for Child Development resources**, which have been recently revised, were made available to ISSA members to use in trainings, and the Senior Program Manager will be available for technical assistance. In some countries, National UNICEF offices started to explore more in depth cooperation with ISSA Member NGOs in this field.

2. Challenges

- The coordination of the Home Visiting project is demanding in terms of liaising with different partners engaged in the project and coordinating the work of a large group of experts hired for developing the standards and for writing or reviewing course modules. Experts were recruited from different continents (including from CEE/CIS) via ISSA's and UNICEF's networks of partners. Similar courses and other relevant resources from different countries were reviewed in order to inform the development of this training package, by making sure it builds on existing knowledge and at the same time being relevant to the needs in CEE/CIS.

Partner: UNICEF Regional Office

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

Overview of Progress under Pillar IV

The work under this Pillar focuses on strengthening the capacity of the network to be effective in achieving the other strategic goals in pursuit of ISSA's mission.

Objectives:

- *Ensure good participative Governance and effective Operations*
- *Work towards achieving ISSA's financial sustainability*
- *Strengthen ISSA as growing learning community and support members to contribute to and benefit from it*
- *Position ISSA as a leader in ECD in relevant national, regional and international forums*

1. Membership Matters

1.1. Main achievements

- **Recruitment of new members and Friends of ISSA:** In 2013 the Secretariat continued to recruit new members and Friends of ISSA by disseminating leaflets and placing announcements through communications channels of partners. During the last months of the year, a recruitment campaign was launched, which entailed: reaching out to ISSA's partners and to participants in previous ISSA Conferences, engaging current members, offering a discounted fee and hosting a reception in Leiden, to celebrate the move of the office and to connect with Dutch partners.

By December 2013, ISSA welcomed **14 new Affiliate Members**:

1. University of Northampton, Northampton – UK
2. Fundacion Leer, Buenos Aires – Argentina
3. University of Applied Sciences, Kaunas – Lithuania
4. Promotion of Parents and Educators in Education NGO , Baku – Azerbaijan
5. Vakystes sodas NGO, Vilnius - Lithuania
6. Burgas Free University, Burgas, Bulgaria
7. Anthioch University, Los Angeles, USA
8. Balkan Sunflowers, Pristina, Kosova
9. International Child Development Initiatives, Leiden, The Netherlands
10. Roma Humanitarian Center, Bujanovac, Serbia
11. Child Care International, Lettele, The Netherlands
12. Group for Children and Youth “Indigo”, Nis, Serbia
13. Multikultura, Tetovo, Macedonia
14. Katholieke Hogeschool VIVES campus, Tielt, Belgium

In 2013 ISSA also welcomed **5 new Full Members**:

1. Wide Open School, Ziar nad Hronom, Slovakia
2. Partners Hungary Foundation, Budapest, Hungary
3. Centre for Innovation in the Early Years (VBJK), Gent, Belgium
4. Bureau MUTANT, Wageningen, The Netherlands
5. "Schedia" Centre for Artistic and Pedagogical Training, Athens, Greece

By December 2013, there were **590 Friends of ISSA** registered on the ISSA Online Community, and in total **47 ISSA Members** (14 Affiliate Members and 33 Full Members). See Annex II for a full list of ISSA Members by the end of 2013.

- Three **Member Exchanges** approved by the Program Committee were funded in 2013:
 - The Center for Innovations in Education/Azerbaijan invited Comenius Foundation/Poland to Baku for sharing their experience in setting up community based services, given their previous successful experience of scaling-up such services in Poland. The activity was a very successful one, given the follow-up envisaged by CIE:
 - Development of a policy paper on community-based preschool alternatives to be discussed with experts during a roundtable and to be submitted to the Ministry of Education
 - Meetings planned with municipalities, with the Ministry of Justice and the National Association of Municipalities
 - Outlining a state program on supporting rural municipalities for provision of community-based preschool services.
 - The municipality in the second largest city of Azerbaijan with large low income and refugee population is planning to create reach-out services of public kindergartens to support 130 parents’ self-help groups.
 - The Open Academy Step by Step/Croatia asked for support from the Step by Step Czech Republic to host the visit of representatives from a Croatian kindergarten to a Czech kindergarten for learning more about establishing a model center.

- The Center for Education Initiatives/Latvia asked for an exchange with the Center for Innovative Education/Lithuania on knowledge and practice on how the quality principles are implemented in the education system of Lithuania. The application followed the participation of Regina Sabaliauskiene in January to a roundtable with governmental agencies on the quality of early childhood services and is part of an advocacy plan to promote quality. The activity was postponed for 2014 in order to find the most appropriate moment and context for such a roundtable.
- Although an application from FEIS Kyrgyzstan was submitted in February and was not approved by the Program Committee, during the month of June, the ISSA Secretariat responded to FEIS's call for **technical assistance** in reviewing a training package for preschool professionals and in conducting a training on mentoring. The Secretariat facilitated support from two members in the network. The Center for Innovative Education/Lithuania provided assistance in reviewing the training package in the framework of the ISSA Quality Principles and the Center for Innovations in Education/Azerbaijan provided the training on mentoring through Ulviyya Mikailova.
- Continuing with a mechanism started in 2011, **professional development funds** were available also in 2013 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. The funds were used for:
 - Participation in the Regional Sector Monitoring Initiative Regional Workshop for GPE countries
 - Participation in the Eurochild's 10th Annual Conference "Building an Inclusive Europe: The contribution of children's participation"
 - Participation in the 3rd International Congress of Psychology in Bosnia and Herzegovina
 - NEPC Summer School 2013: Empowering Teachers for the 21st Century
 - Doctoral Study, University of Zagreb, Faculty of Philosophy, Department of Pedagogy
 - Master program "Leadership in Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Education", Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences
 - Attending a training for accountants
 - Attending a training for Web-Designers: HTML, CSS, Adobe Photoshop and web development: PHP, MySQL, JavaScript, Joomla
 - Organizing a Quality Assurance and Improvement meeting with staff and trainers
 - Purchasing books
- The Secretariat worked with different bodies in ISSA (the Program Committee, the Board, the Conference Organizing Committee and the Conference Program Committee) to prepare the **2014 ISSA Conference**, which will be an important event since it marks the 20th anniversary of the Step by Step Program and the 15th anniversary of ISSA. The Save the Date Announcement was launched in August: http://www.issa.nl/2014_ISSA_CONFERENCE_SAVE_THE_DATE.html. In the last four months of the year the Conference Advisory Program Committee worked on defining the strands of the conference for the second announcement and the Organizing Committee on the conference image, contracting the conference organizing agency and the hotel for the venue of the conference. The event will be organized in partnership with the Open Society Foundations, Partners Hungary, UNICEF and DECET. The Call for Applications and the website of the Conference will be launched in March.
- After successfully hiring a suitable service provider at the end of 2012, during 2013, the Secretariat worked on redesigning ISSA's **external website**. A template was prepared for a new way to organize

the pages of the site, linking with initiatives and major priorities of the 2013-2015 Strategy. The technical aspects of developing the website required more time than envisaged, as more functions and sections will be added (e. g. submitting the membership application online, online payments etc.) to make the website user friendly, informative of all ISSA's work and also allow future developments as ISSA's activity will expand. The launch was postponed for the beginning of 2014. The **ISSA Online Community** continued to be expanded, with more news, more resources in the online library and more Friends of ISSA being signed in.

- OSF/ECP and ISSA began a new partnership initiative focusing on the **sustainability of the Step by Step NGOs**, members of ISSA. Consultants from INTRAC were hired by OSF to assist in the process. A survey was conducted, collecting the views of the NGOs on Programme Sustainability, Financial Sustainability, Sources of Capacity and NGO Sustainability. Sessions on this topic were organized during the workshop prior to the Council Meeting, and during the Council Meeting itself. INTRAC presented a Survey Report to the Board and the Council. The initiative will continue into 2014, with a process of NGO self-assessment, site visits and regional meetings focusing on sustainability.

1.2. Challenges

- Finding most appropriate **online tools**, good service providers and most user-friendly systems for knowledge management and content management remains a challenge. Moving to more online interactions requires shifts in the organizational culture.
- After 3 years of making this opportunity available to members, in 2013 the evaluation of **Member Exchange applications** was a bit challenging, given the way that the application forms were filled in. The Program Committee reflected on this and proposed a revision of the application form for 2014.

2. Organizational Management and Operations

2.1. Main achievements

2.1.1. Program Management

- Since 2013 is the first year of implementing the 2013-2015 Strategy, only one **Program Committee Meeting** was planned, focusing on assuring smooth implementation of the proposed initiatives. The meeting took place in February 2013 in Vilnius and contributed to:
 - defining the Program Committee members' responsibilities for 2013
 - defining the structure and main issues to be included in the data collection survey to be run in the spring of 2013 – plan of action and distribution of responsibilities among PC members
 - defining the structure of the Quality Portfolio
 - fine-tuning the content of the leaflets advocating for quality
 - evaluation of the Technical Assistance and Member Exchange applications

The 2013 Data Collection Survey was developed with the participation of all Program Committee members and was launched according to the plan. Members of the Program Committee advanced a

thematic proposal to the ISSA Board for the ISSA 2014 Conference, thus initiating the preparations for the organization of this important event.

- In the first months of the year the selection process for hiring a **Senior Program Manager** was launched and led to a successful result. After conducting interviews with a shortlist of three candidates, in June 2013, Zorica Trikic was selected and hired for this position. She started working in the ISSA Secretariat at the beginning of June 2013 and took over also the position of REYN Coordinator. This was a very important step for ISSA, since the programs are expanding and several new initiatives were launched in 2012 and 2013, requiring additional highly skilled professional staff for coordinating and running the ISSA programs.

2.1.2. Monitoring and Evaluation

- For monitoring and evaluating more accurately ISSA's outcomes for the 2013-2015 Strategy, for the first time in ISSA, a **Monitoring and Evaluation Plan** was developed in close consultation with and with assistance from OSF/ECP colleagues. Going through several revisions from January until June, the plan was also discussed with the ISSA Board during the June Board Meeting. This is one of the most important achievements for ISSA in 2013, since it brings more clarity to what should be the concrete outcomes and targets by the end of 2015 as well as an evidence-based approach to ISSA's impact. Qualitative and quantitative data will be collected for each initiative under the four Pillars using various tools: interviews, surveys, evaluation forms, online tools for website and platforms, etc. The process is complex and ambitious and it is a first attempt for making ISSA's outcomes more visible and showing accountability for what the funds are spent in terms of outcomes. See Annex III for a Progress Report on Indicators.
- The **Data Collection Survey** on ISSA's Full Members' programs, achievements, challenges and cooperation was launched at the end of May. All ISSA Full Members filled in the survey and the report was shared with the ISSA members and the Board on the Online Community in July. <http://www.issa.nl/oc/attachments/article/129/ISSA%20Full%20Members%20Program%20REPORT%202013.pdf>

2.1.3. Financial Management

- During the first half of 2013 two audits were successfully conducted: the Audit of ISSA Hungary and the Audit of ISSA Netherlands. The consolidated Audit Report was shared with the Audit Committee for review, and after that it was presented to the Board and the Council. See Annex IV.
- VAT Reports were submitted in The Netherlands and VAT advisors were consulted to make sure ISSA complies with all requirements.
- Quarterly financial reports were prepared. See Annex V.
- ISSA advertised and interviewed candidates for the Finance Manager position; since no suitable candidates were found, an Interim Financial Management Consultant was hired instead.
- With input from the consultant, a new financial management system was developed and introduced from July 1, in the context of the office relocation.
- In the second half of the year new service providers were hired for payroll and for advising on VAT and other regulations.
- New simplified coding was put in place, and the new Office Coordinator was trained to use the new financial management system.

2.1.4. Fundraising and Partnership Building

- In 2013 ISSA has been successful in raising funds for two important initiatives: the Early Years Regional Alliance and the Training Package for Home Visitors, from the World Bank via the Consultative Group and UNICEF, respectively. Funding for both initiatives is likely to be renewed for the following year(s).
- After submitting concept papers during the year, at the end of 2013, ISSA and the Bernard van Leer Foundation began exploring a closer partnership around Roma inclusion and expanding the Romani Early Years Network to Western Europe.
- Discussions continued with WFD regarding potential funding to continue the partnership with IBM.
- ISSA is actively exploring potential new funding sources for REYN, including UNESCO and the Council of Europe.
- In-kind support plus a grant was obtained from Utopa Foundation for the office move. The foundation is the owner of the Child Rights Home, where ISSA's new office will be.
- ISSA entered a partnership agreement with UNICEF to deliver the training for UNICEF staff in Bulgaria.
- ISSA entered a partnership agreement with VBJK, a new Full Member from Belgium, for expanding the project When Wanda Meets ISSA, which will be funded by the European Structural Funds in Belgium. The project will involve ISSA Full Members from Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary, and Slovenia.
- A grant proposal submitted by Innocenti Institute, in which ISSA is a partner along with three Full Members from Bulgaria, Lithuania and Slovenia, was approved by the Lifelong Learning Programme - Leonardo da Vinci Agency in Italy.
- During 2013, grant reports were prepared to all current donors: OSF, UNESCO, UNICEF, IBM and the Consultative Group.
- With regards to visibility, ISSA was invited to send representatives to various international meetings via the networks of Eurochild, Fundacion Secretariado Gitano, the Consultative Group or UNICEF. The resources and achievements of the ISSA network were featured or at least mentioned in several reports, including a Case Study for a report commissioned by the European Commission's DG Education and Culture, as well as reports prepared by UNESCO and the Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years.

2.1.5. Office Management and Relocation

- ISSA recruited and interviewed candidates for a new Office Coordinator. After interviewing two short-listed candidates, Els van Zalinge began working part-time in this position from mid-July 2013, being based in the new office in Leiden. ISSA's previous Finance and Administration Officer, Judit Levenda, stopped working for ISSA at the end of June 2013.
- New providers were recruited and services negotiated for the new office in Leiden: financial software, telephone, internet, web hosting, web design, computer network maintenance, payroll, tax advice etc. Actions were taken to discontinue similar services provided for the office in Hungary.
- During 2013, the Executive Director worked on the complex process of closing down ISSA Hungary, the legal entity ISSA used for administering the office in Hungary. The closing date was May 31,

2013, and the papers for voluntary dissolution were submitted to the court. The process is expected to take several months before the closing is finalized.

- Working on all aspects related to the move, the ED consulted several sources in Holland, and collected information on labor law, immigration, tax regulations, VAT reporting, personnel policies, salary scales, cost of living etc. The ED and the ISSA Board finalized the new Personnel Policies and salary scales. The Board met over several conference calls and also worked via email consultations.
- An application submitted in mid-June to the immigration office in Holland for ISSA to be able to hire Highly Skilled Migrants was approved in October. After that, three ISSA staff applied for work permits which were granted at the end of November.
- The moving date for the office was September 15, when ISSA's Membership Officer, Eva Izsak, relocated to Holland. As a Hungarian citizen, the formalities for her to begin working in Holland were less time consuming or complex. The other staff members (the Executive Director, the Program Director and the Senior Program Manager) were able to move only in mid-January 2014 after the work permits were approved and after the winter holidays. For several months before the end of the year, the staff worked from Leiden, Budapest and Belgrade, respectively.

2.2. Challenges

- By far the biggest challenge related to operations was to prepare the **office move**, with all its aspects: financial, legal, administrative and above all human resources. The process turned out to be overwhelming and extremely complex for the ED to handle on her own, while continuing her regular work, at a time when the organization is growing. It was particularly difficult since information needed to be obtained on different aspects: labor law, taxation, immigration, accounting, salary scales, insurance, non-profit practices in Holland etc. In hindsight, there are two important lessons learnt: 1. it would have been better if the ED and the Board would have first addressed the staff costs issues when planning the move. 2. it would have also been better to hire a consultant to manage at least some aspects of the move.
- The development of the **Monitoring and Evaluation Plan** was challenging given that it was for the first time that such a plan is developed in ISSA and that it is linked with ISSA's strategy, which did not include any evaluation component or defined targets. Such a mechanism is new for ISSA and it requires additional time and resources for implementation. Setting the targets for each initiative under each of the four Pillars required reflection on how much can be achieved in the next three years, what are the limits and boundaries, and where ISSA should push more for growth and depth. The plan demands a very good organization of the human and technical resources involved in this component so that the indicators are constantly tracked and fed into an indicators' database. It is to be considered if additional resources will be needed for implementing the plan.
- The **collection of programmatic data** from ISSA Full Members through the survey is challenging when it comes to respecting the deadlines. Given that is very important for the data to be collected from all members, delays in filling the survey by one member, causes delays in starting the processing of all data, and thus in producing the report.
- Given the time and efforts required and the complexity of the other processes, the ISSA staff did not have the time to continue to fully explore **income generation possibilities** – sales of resources or

services. This will be easier done once the office has relocated and the staff will have finalized the complex proves of moving, opening a new office and closing down ISSA Hungary.

3. Governance

3.1. Main achievements

3.1.1. Board Matters

- During 2013 there were several Board Conference Calls, consultations via email and two meetings in-person (June and December, both in Leiden, The Netherlands). The following issues were on the Board's agenda during 2013:
 - Finalizing ISSA's personnel policies and salary scales; other issues related to the office move
 - Reviewing incoming membership applications
 - Reviewing requests for license to ISSA resources.
 - Reviewing a template for a license agreement for ISSA's resources
 - Reviewing and providing feedback to suggestions put forward by the Board Elections Task Force on possible ways to improve the Board Elections process.
 - Providing input on the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan
 - Providing input on the plans for the 2014 ISSA Conference
 - Reviewing the ISSA Brand Guidelines
 - Reviewing the Financial Policies and Procedures Relevant to Members
 - Deciding on location for the Council Meetings (2013, 2014 and 2015)
 - Providing input in the plans for the Annual Conference (2014)
 - Reviewing the Audit Report
 - Reflecting on the sustainability of member NGOs and on ISSA's Sustainability, with input from INTRAC consultants.

- Board Elections were conducted during the Autumn via electronic vote and all three board members running for a second term were re-elected. Nives Milinovic was elected a President Elect.

3.1.2. Council Matters

- The Nominations Committee launched a Call for Nominations in April 2013. The candidates for the Board Elections 2013 were announced in July – meeting the requirements from the Internal Regulations in terms of minimum and maximum candidates for the vacant seats available:
 - there were two candidates running for one vacant seat of independent candidates (one Board Member running for a second term and one new candidate)
 - there were three candidates running for two vacant seats of beneficiary candidates (two Board Members running for a second term and one new candidate)
- The Nominations Committee organized an electronic vote for the Board Elections 2013 during the autumn.
- The Board Elections Task Force which was set up by the Council during the Council Meeting 2012 worked on preparing proposals for improving the board elections process. The proposals were reviewed by the Board and feedback was provided to the Task Force from the Board and the

Secretariat via email and skype calls. The Task Force presented a list of issues for discussion during the Council Meeting, and members discussed ways in which the work of the Nominations Committee and the elections process (including when voting online) could be improved.

- Initially planned for mid-October, the Council Meeting dates were rescheduled for December 10-12. The location was also changed – initially planned to take place in Albania, the meeting was held in Leiden. During the meeting, the Council:
 - Reflected on achievements and challenges during 2013 in implementing the ISSA Work Plan
 - Reviewed the Audit Report 2012 and the Third Quarterly Financial Report for 2013
 - Discussed issues raised by the Task Force on Board Elections
 - Discussed and clarified the role of Regional Anchors
 - Discussed issues related to Monitoring and Evaluation and the Quality Portfolio
 - Set up a Task Force for activities marking the two anniversaries during the 2014 Conference
 - Ratified the decision of the Board to accept a number of new Full and Affiliate Members
 - Engaged in discussions on NGO Sustainability and plans for 2014
 - Voted on the Work Plan and Budget for 2014

3.2. Challenges

- During discussions of the Board Elections Task Force and of the Board, it became obvious that the process of Board Elections needs improvements. The functioning of the Nominations Committee could be improved by making sure that members who are elected to work on it have the necessary skills and time to work on the process effectively, with support from the Board and Secretariat. The mandate of the Nominations Committee should be clarified – they need to actively recruit candidates and also should feel empowered to screen and pre-select candidates. Board elections should be more closely linked with the priorities in the current strategy, to make sure that the necessary skills and talent are brought to the Board. Discussions were organized during the Council Meeting and members reached agreement to improve the process along the lines proposed by the Nominations Committee and the Board.
- During the electronic vote conducted in the Autumn, approximately one third of the members voted either in the round of Board Elections or in the round of President Elections. Although only 2 members participated in none of these rounds (the rest participated in one or the other), the Board, the Secretariat and the Regional Anchors will need to explore with members what are the reasons for not participating in higher numbers in all rounds. A clear system will be established to record also abstentions during electronic voting, not only votes pro or con.

III. LIST OF ANNEXES

Annex I	Early Years Regional Alliance Survey Report
Annex II	List of ISSA Members
Annex III	Progress Report on Indicators
Annex IV	ISSA Audit Report 2012
Annex V	2013 Financial Report