



25+ years for
Early Childhood
Development

ISSA Annual Report 2024



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Welcome Message

Dear Friends, Partners, and Supporters,

2024 was a landmark year for ISSA. We celebrated **25 years of ISSA** and **30 years of the Step by Step Program**—milestones that remind us how far our community and movement have come in advancing our shared vision: to ensure that **every child can reach their full potential by building inclusive, empowering systems that support young children and their families**. We also gathered for the first **ISSA Conference** in five years, in Sofia, Bulgaria, to reflect, reconnect, and reimagine the early years ecosystem with **over 450 participants from more than 50 countries**.

Amidst these milestones, however, the **realities on the ground remained deeply complex**. Persistent war, widespread displacement, mounting climate crises, and deepening inequities tested us all—pressures further compounded by ongoing defunding across our region and field. Through it all, **the strength of the ISSA Network remained unwavering**. From emergency response and trauma-informed care to advocacy, innovation, and inclusive systems change, our members continued to turn adversity into an opportunity to create impact.

In the face of uncertainty, we end 2024 with **confidence and hope**. The ambitions of our new **2024–2028 strategy** have taken root. **Collaboration is deeper. Partnerships are strengthened**. And this **Annual Report** reflects a renewed commitment to elevating **our members' achievements**, highlighting their impact across more than 30 countries and the ways the **ISSA Hub** continues to **convene, catalyze, and champion** the early childhood field.

This report is more than a summary; it's a spotlight. A celebration of the people and partnerships transforming early childhood every day. It's proof that even in turbulent times, **our collective action lights the way** and that **a strong, connected network can do far more than any single organization alone**. As a network, **we amplify our collective efforts**, scaling local innovations into national or regional solutions and turning shared challenges into shared progress. Together, we stay grounded in our mission to help **every child thrive in supported, empowered families and communities**.

Here's to bold beginnings, lasting change, and the road ahead.

With gratitude and resolve,

Henriette Heimgaertner, ISSA Board President
Liana Ghent, ISSA Executive Director



Leiden, 2024



About ISSA

As a dynamic membership association, we are a leading international learning community powered by Europe's and Central Asia's foremost early years experts. Our network connects and strengthens actors from across Europe and Central Asia, united by a shared unwavering goal to ensure that every child reaches their full potential, and our work is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. With a steadfast commitment to advancing early childhood development based on principles of inclusivity and equity, we champion holistic and integrated systems, policies, and high-quality services for all young children.

In fostering purpose-driven collaborations among members, partners, and supporters, ISSA activates powerful network mechanisms to create a collective synergy that significantly amplifies our impact on early childhood development in diverse, dynamic, and multi-faceted environments. Our expertise lies in devising and implementing evidence-based solutions customized to meet distinct localized needs, distinguishing us for our ability to foster trust and resilience. Moreover, we excel in generating and sharing new knowledge and fostering innovations focused on transforming early childhood systems, thereby ensuring improved outcomes for all.



About ISSA / Vision, Mission, Shared Purpose, Values

VISION

a society in which all stakeholders – families, communities and professionals – work together to ensure that each child reaches their unique full potential and embraces the values of social justice, equity and democracy.

MISSION

as an international learning community powered by leading early childhood experts in Europe and Central Asia, we unite and support professionals and partners to deliver equitable, high-quality early years services. These services promote the development of the whole child across all domains. We constructively challenge existing knowledge and practice and co-construct more effective approaches and models.

SHARED PURPOSE

ISSA is a network of [100 Member organizations](#) committed to sustaining and expanding a movement for high-quality and well-coordinated systems, services, and policies for young children and their families. This is to ensure that every child has the best start in life.

VALUES

in all its operations, activities, and communications, ISSA promotes openness and transparency, fairness, respectfulness, empathy, and the highest levels of professionalism. The following core values form our common identity and guide our actions as we interact within the network, and with partners, supporters and all stakeholders.

- **Respect for rights:** we uphold and advocate for the protection of children's rights in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and for the rights and dignity of families and the ECD workforce.
- **Diversity and inclusivity:** we champion diversity in an open democratic society. We uphold the values of non-discrimination, respect, and fairness.
- **Equity:** we support equitable policies, promoting access for every child to high-quality services.
- **Professionalism and life-long learning:** we promote the key conditions for ensuring the quality of services – ethical practices, professional development and life-long learning.
- **Cooperation:** we support participation and partnerships among all those looking after the interests of children and their well-being.
- **Integrity and accountability:** we hold ourselves responsible to Members, partners, donors, and stakeholders through clarity, transparency, and openness.



About ISSA / ISSA Strategy 2024–28

Co-created with our Members, ISSA's current strategy reinforces our role as a dynamic impact network. It builds on core strengths—peer learning, distributed leadership, and strategic partnerships—while advancing a network mindset and positioning ISSA as a catalyst for integrated, high-quality early childhood systems. Embracing an ecosystem approach, the strategy promotes Member-led collaboration, cross-sector innovation, and broader engagement to drive greater synergy, resilience, and impact.



GOAL	OBJECTIVES
Collaborative Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a strong foundation for collaboration, innovation, and cross-country learning among members. • Empower members in their efforts to strengthen early childhood systems.
Holistic ECD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance a shared agenda for holistic early childhood development. • Promote equitable, integrated services and a competent, diverse workforce for children 0–10.
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	KEY ACTIONS
Convene, Support & Influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead and participate in multi-sectoral initiatives. • Facilitate member collaboration and innovation. • Increase diversity in membership and partnerships.
Mobilize & Share Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen ISSA as a learning community with a network mindset. • Enhance ISSA's role as a knowledge broker and catalyst. • Enable commercial and philanthropic opportunities.
Improve & Grow Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop skills to recruit and retain a diverse membership. • Align communication strategies with network and sector needs. • Grow entrepreneurial capacity within the Network Hub.
Ensure Delivery of Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen the ISSA brand. • Improve resource availability for communications and programming.

About ISSA / Our People, Our Strength

ISSA is powered by people. Our governance and operations are driven by a richly diverse community of professionals united by a shared purpose. Our Board is composed of committed experts from member organizations across the region and other leaders, who bring invaluable insight and ensure that ISSA's direction is grounded in field realities. At the same time, our Network Hub is home to a vibrant, multilingual team from different countries, working across a wide range of skills and disciplines—from early childhood development and policy, to communications, learning, finance, and systems change.

Together, this unique mix of talent and perspectives shapes everything we do—from strategy to implementation. They are the foundation of our collaborative, impact-driven work.

**Want to meet the people driving ISSA's
governance and operations?**

Explore the full team:

issa.nl/organization-governance

issa.nl/secretariat



The ISSA Community



As a membership association, the ISSA network is powered by leading Early Childhood Development experts from 41 countries, primarily across Europe and Central Asia. Our diverse community includes NGOs, professional associations, academic institutions, public bodies, and international organizations working together to advance the early years.

ISSA Members at a Glance

In 2024, ISSA welcomed 8 new organizations from Belgium, Ireland, North Macedonia, South Africa, Slovakia, Turkey, Ukraine and the United Kingdom to the Network, and one former member re-joined from the Netherlands, ending the year with 100 member organizations.

ISSA's membership base at the end of 2024

	NO OF COUNTRIES	MEMBERS
European Union	18	48
Rest of Europe and Central Asia	18	46
Other parts of the world	5	6
Total	41	100

Membership diversity

NGOs	65
Universities/research bodies	10
Professional associations	10
Early childhood service providers	5
International organizations	4
Governmental/public bodies	4
Private companies	2
Total	100

Welcome to Our New Members in 2024

- **Association for Social Development and Aid Mobilization - ASAM**, Turkey, Full Member
- **Early Learning Initiative – ELI**, Ireland, Full Member
- **Women Delcevo**, North Macedonia, Full Member
- **Seriti Institute**, South Africa, Full Member
- **Early Years**, UK, Full Member
- **Vormingscentrum Opvoeding en Kinderopvang – Training Centre Education and Childcare**, Belgium, Full Member
- **Carpathian Foundation**, Slovakia, Full Member
- **Ukrainian Institute of Educational Development**, Ukraine, Affiliate Member
- **Humankind**, the Netherlands, Full Member (re-joined in 2024)

To explore and meet ISSA Members, visit our [member directory](#).

ISSA Membership Survey Report 2025: Executive Summary

Introduction and Methodology

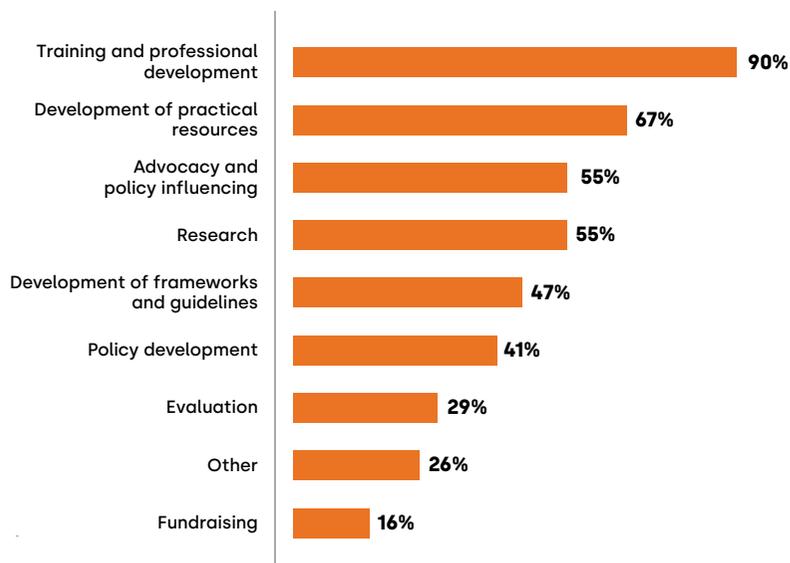
Between 28 February and 2 April 2025, ISSA conducted its annual Membership Survey, garnering responses from 60 of our 100 member organizations (a 60 percent response rate) across more than 30 countries in Europe, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and SubSaharan Africa. The survey combined closed quantitative questions—capturing core metrics of reach, expertise, and service delivery—with open qualitative prompts to surface member achievements, challenges, and strategic priorities. The resulting data form the empirical foundation for ISSA's upcoming strategy cycle, ensuring that our network's future learning, advocacy, and peerexchange activities are firmly grounded in the realities on the ground.



ISSA Membership Survey Report 2025 / ISSA Members' Areas of Programmatic Focus



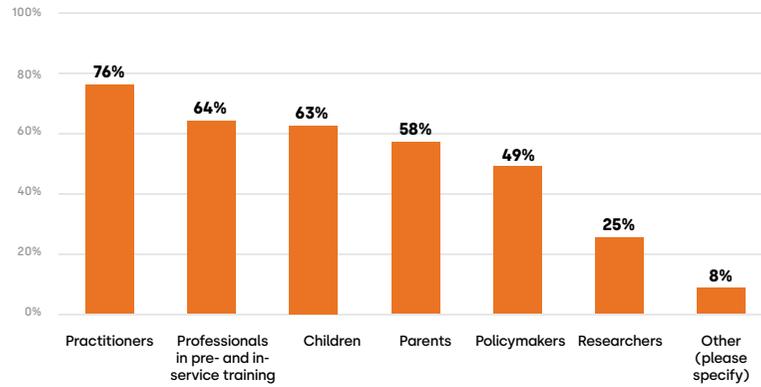
Over the past two years, members working in early childhood development (ECD), education, and family support have demonstrated a robust and diversified programmatic focus, responding to both ongoing systemic challenges and emergent crises. The work has coalesced around ten core thematic areas, each contributing to a holistic ecosystem that supports children, families, and communities, with many members working across multiple programmatic areas.



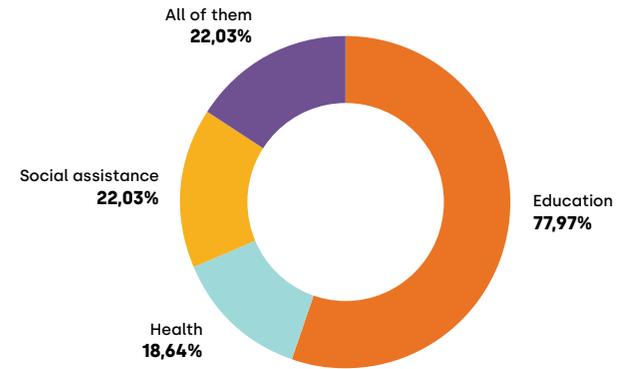
Early Childhood Education & Development (ECE/ECD)	Holistic child development, inclusive ECD, safe environments, learning through play, multilingual transitions
Parental & Family Support	Parenting and home visiting programs, mental health support, gender-responsive initiatives
Teacher & Professional Development	Pre-/in-service training, mentoring, curriculum development, institutional capacity-building
Policy, Advocacy & System Strengthening	ECEC policy reform, strategic advocacy, systems change, grantmaking support for CSOs
Health, Mental Health & Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)	Psychosocial support, refugee/war-affected children, healthcare access
Equity, Inclusion & Social Justice	Roma inclusion, community-based education, social inclusion programming
Youth Engagement & Skill Development	Youth activism, life skills training, civic and social engagement
Research & Evidence Generation	Participatory research, M&E, impact evaluation, knowledge translation
Community Development & Crisis Response	Local development, humanitarian response, resilience-building in fragile settings
Cross-sectoral & Intergenerational Approaches	Integrated services, intergenerational learning and community dialogue

ISSA Membership Survey Report 2025 / ISSA Members' Core Constituency

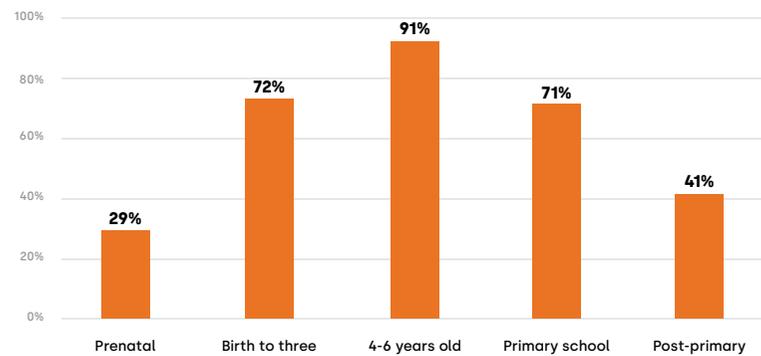
Target Groups



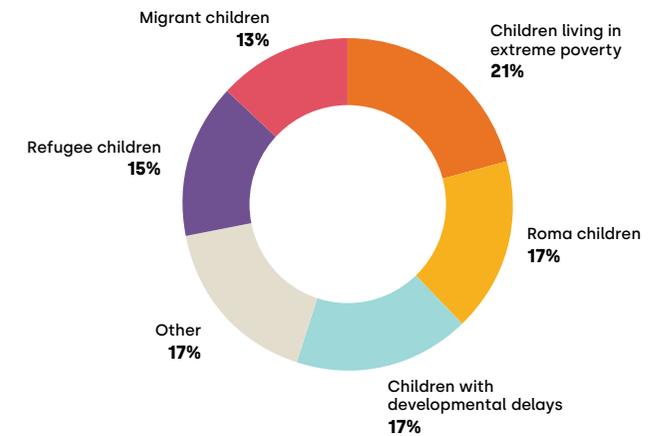
Sectoral focus



Children's Age Ranges



Vulnerable Groups



ISSA Membership Survey Report 2025 / Network Support and Collaboration

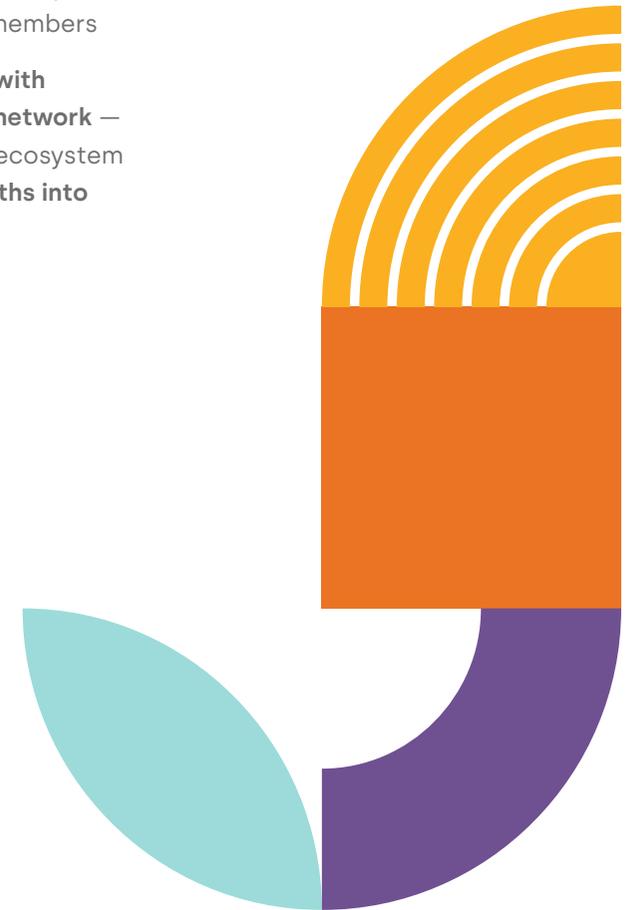
ISSA's role as a convenor and capacitybuilder remains highly valued.

Engaged network activities



Powerful Collaborations

- Nearly **half of ISSA members** reported collaboration with fellow members
- **Three quarters** partnered with **organizations beyond the network** — demonstrating how ISSA's ecosystem **amplifies individual strengths into scalable, systemic impact.**



Spotlighting ISSA Members' Achievements and Impact

As part of the 2025 survey, ISSA members also shared highlights of the impact made as a result of their work in the recent two years. ISSA members worked across complex and shifting landscapes, navigating conflict, displacement, policy reform, and workforce challenges. Their efforts reflected **deep-rooted expertise, strong local partnerships, and the power of a connected network** driving change at multiple levels. Nearly half of ISSA members reported collaboration with fellow members, and three quarters partnered with organizations beyond the network demonstrating how **ISSA's ecosystem amplifies individual strengths into scalable, systemic impact**.

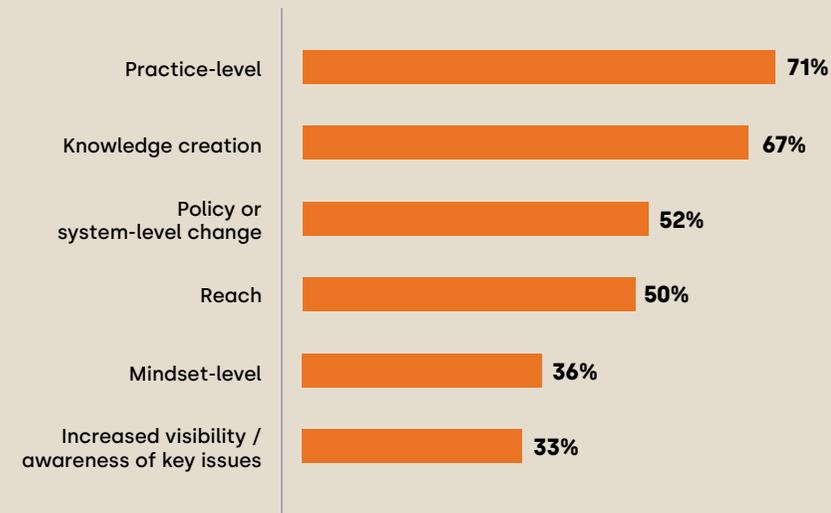
In Europe, Central Asia, and beyond, members drove high-impact efforts that improved lives and strengthened systems. Whether responding to crisis, expanding inclusive education, or shaping national policy, their work delivered tangible change for children, families, and communities, particularly in the most vulnerable contexts.

This selection highlights just a fraction of their reach in 2024, underscored by strong results across **practice, knowledge creation, and system-level transformation**.



Areas of Expertise:

(Many members have expertise across multiple categories)



Spotlighting ISSA Members' Achievements and Impact / Support in Crisis and Humanitarian Settings

Amid war, displacement, and natural disasters, ISSA members mobilized extraordinary responses keeping children safe, supported, and learning.

Following the massive earthquake in Turkey, **AÇEV - Mother and Child Education Foundation** delivered psychosocial and early childhood development education to support 15,000+ children and caregivers across 15 provinces, including affected areas. Meanwhile, in Ukraine, **Amna Refugee Healing Network** provided trauma-informed care to 14,000+ displaced people. **LHSI – NGO Labour and Health Social Initiatives (Ukraine)** welcomed 1,100+ children to a new PlayHub in Kyiv. **Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation** offered educational activities related to psychosocial support to 18,000+ teachers and 16,000+ parents. **Carpathian Foundation-Hungary** supported hundreds of mostly Roma Ukrainian refugee families. **Step by Step Educational Program (Moldova)** and **Škola Dokoran – Wide Open School (Slovakia)** sustained child-friendly refugee support through play hubs and psychosocial programming. **Seriti Institute's aRe Bapaleng program (South Africa)** supported responsive parenting in underserved neighborhoods, each member turned frontline challenges into meaningful, measurable action. **PRO-FIL Foundation (Poland)** addressed trauma through children's helpline cases.

Together, the network proved that even in instability, the early years can—and must—be protected with coordinated, compassionate, responsive, and scalable action.



Spotlighting ISSA Members' Achievements and Impact / Research, Policy, and Advocacy

ISSA members drove policy reform, legal change, and public awareness to strengthen systems for young children and families.

At the global level, **Dublin City University's Early Childhood Research Centre (Ireland)** helped establish a UN working group developing a legal instrument on the universal right to early childhood education. The **First Years First Priority** campaign, co-led by **Eurochild (Belgium)** and ISSA, helped raise awareness on the need to prioritize young children and families, especially those most vulnerable, in policy design and public funding.

At the national level, **Organization WOMAN Delcevo** (North Macedonia) increased the number of professionals who work on children rights protection and raised awareness about protecting children from domestic violence. **Nuri Hidoyat (Tajikistan)** worked on developing a new ECD curriculum. **VBJK (Belgium)** Influenced national policy aimed at fostering continuity between childcare, kindergarten and out of school care. **Alliance for Childhood European Network Group (Belgium)** participated in an expert group and supported the publication of the guidelines on well-being at school. In the **Czech Republic, Step by Step ČR, o.p.s** helped revise the state curriculum for pre-school and basic education. **Think Equal (UK)** scaled its SEL curriculum with new models for national uptake and **City of Ghent - Child Care Services (Belgium)** has influenced regional policy through innovative projects implemented at the local level focused on accessible childcare. **The Carpathian Foundation (Slovakia)** established OdPerinky—a platform uniting experts working with children at risk of developmental challenges aged 0 to 8 with the goal of

building a comprehensive early childhood support system. **Centre for Child Health and Development (Italy)** championed equitable parenting policies. **Foundation for Educational Initiatives Support (Kyrgyzstan)** developed safety and quality standards for children's clubs and sports at the municipal level.

These efforts reflect how evidence, when guided by vision, becomes a lever for lasting systems change.



Spotlighting ISSA Members' Achievements and Impact Professional Development and Capacity Building

ISSA members elevated the early childhood workforce by delivering bold, evidence-based professional development tailored for scale and equity.

Countless initiatives were executed by ISSA members to support professional development and capacity building. For example, **University of Northampton (United Kingdom)** established a distance learning master's program in Infant and Family mental health and wellbeing. The **Child Development Institute, Center for Preschool and Inclusive Education (Georgia)** has been actively developing a bachelor program in early education. **Open Academy Step by Step (Croatia)** trained 1,500+ professionals in ECEC working with vulnerable communities. They also collaborated with the **Step by Step Centre for Quality in Education at the Educational Research Institute (ERI) in Slovenia**, who lead the project, and the ISSA Hub and to develop Principles of Quality in Education of Teachers ([PIQET](#)) to support Continuous Professional Development trainers; additionally, in a consortium with ISSA Hub and other members, the Step by Step Center for Quality in Education at ERI built a digital platform for virtual study visits that link kindergartens across eight countries ([GREELCO](#)). **CIP – Center for Interactive Pedagogy (Serbia)** co-created a school self-evaluation tool used by 800+ schools and 13,000 school employees. **Mongolian Education Alliance** supported the first cohort of national mentors, with additional training planned for future cohorts. **Community Educational Foundation “School for All” (Kazakhstan)**, **Step by Step Community Foundation (Georgia)**, **VOK - Vormingscentrum voor Opvoeding en Kinderopvang (Belgium)**, **Metropolia School of Applied Sciences (Finland)** and **Childcare International (Netherlands)** offered

pedagogical training and support to early childhood professionals and conducted knowledge exchanges with local and regional partners. In **Armenia**, **Step by Step Benevolent Foundation** developed educator handbooks on media literacy and inclusion and **Step by Step Albania** developed digital resources aimed at five-year-olds. **Kosova Education Center (Kosovo)** introduced nonviolent communication and media-literacy training. **Artevelde University of Applied Sciences (Belgium)** scaled training in playful learning and risky play.

Across the region, educators gained tools to meet children with confidence, creativity, and care.



Spotlighting ISSA Members' Achievements and Impact Inclusive Education

ISSA members advanced inclusion at every level—from national policy to classroom practice and community outreach—ensuring that children with disabilities and those from marginalized groups are no longer left behind.

Open Hearts (Tajikistan) led the development of a national Inclusive Education Concept and helped launch Family and Child Support Centers under the health system. In Ukraine, **SOFT Tulip (Netherlands)** successfully lobbied the Ukrainian government to adopt the Early Intervention model to prevent the institutionalization of children. **Group for Children and Youth "Indigo" (Serbia)** assisted 1,000+ vulnerable children in accessing their rights and the provision of appropriate services. **Pedagogical Center of Montenegro** integrated Roma children into the education system, **Transcarpathian Regional Charitable Fund "Blaho"** supported young Roma children in overcoming learning gaps and preparing for school, while **Balkan Sunflowers Kosovo** has worked on reintegrating children who dropped to re-enroll school. **Foundation for Education and Cultural Initiatives Step by Step (North Macedonia)**, **Rushdi Inclusia (Tajikistan)**, **Mary Immaculate College (Ireland)**, and **United Aid for Azerbaijan** provided targeted support for inclusive teaching for children with special needs in minority communities.

Other members—including **Rise Bulgaria and Trust for Social Achievement (Bulgaria)**, **Platform for Early Care and Development (Czech Republic)**, **Center for Educational Initiatives (Georgia)**, and **ENSEMBLE POUR LA PETITE ENFANCE (France)**—implemented community-rooted models to dismantle barriers and ensure inclusion is not a promise, but a practice.



Spotlighting ISSA Members' Achievements and Impact Community Outreach and Engagement

ISSA members brought learning to life in public spaces, homes, and neighborhoods bridging services and building trust where families live.

In rural areas, **Kali Sara – Roma Information Center (Bosnia and Herzegovina)** sustained community learning hubs. The **Early Learning Initiative (Ireland)** made great strides in advancing home visiting programs in Dublin, while **Mala Ulica (Slovenia)** expanded street-based outreach through local events with the community. **Center for Education Initiatives (Latvia)** developed a community-strengthening model. The **For Our Children Foundation (Bulgaria)** opened four Consultative Hubs for young children and parents in small towns, offering developmental games for young children and consultations for parents on early learning and development of children. **The Human Safety Net (Italy)** integrated financial education for parents into programs aimed at supporting families.

ICDI – International Child Development Initiatives (Netherlands) anchored regional momentum with its TOY for Inclusion Play Hubs—now embedded in 10+ countries as trusted community gateways for play, learning, inclusion and participation. **Partners Hungary** established 13 Play Hubs and supported the development of an ECD strategy in eight municipalities using the Primokiz approach.



Spotlighting ISSA Members' Achievements and Impact Youth Engagement and Skill Development

ISSA members bridged early childhood and adolescence with targeted programs that reconnected youth to learning, well-being, and civic life.

In North Macedonia, **Association Multikultura** mobilized youth for civic engagement and strengthened local accountability. **ASAM - Association for Social Development and Aid Mobilization (Turkey)** implemented the *Children and Adolescents Friendly Learning Spaces* Program aimed at providing an inclusive learning environment for children who are out of school or at risk of dropping out of school. **TNO Innovation for Life (Netherlands)** supported preventive youth care, with a focus on the connection between children's physical, social and psychological problems.





ISSA's members across Europe and Central Asia are driving meaningful change—shaping policies, strengthening systems, and improving lives where it matters most. In 2024 alone, these collective efforts directly reached over 300,000 children, 150,000 caregivers, 25,000 professionals, and 2,000 institutions.

Members produced more than 100 publications, delivered over 5,000 trainings, achieved practice-level improvements in 71% of member organizations, generated new knowledge (67%), and influenced policy or system reform in 52% of contexts. This impact reflects the power of a connected network. Through collaboration, ISSA members deliver systemic solutions across emergency response, workforce development, and community engagement.



Challenges and Priorities

Even as ISSA's members drive change across diverse contexts, they navigate **persistent barriers** that demand bold, adaptive responses. The challenges ahead are complex—but so are the opportunities for innovation, resilience, and growth.

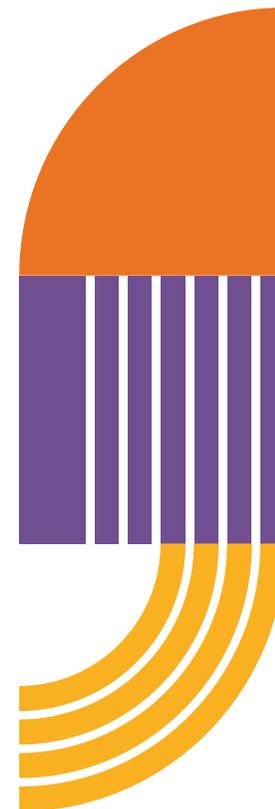
Most Common Challenges

- Limited access to quality early childhood education, especially for marginalized groups
- Chronic underfunding and financial instability
- Lack of systemic recognition of community-based, preventative, and non-formal education models
- Staff shortages and limited professional development opportunities in ECEC
- Weak or outdated policies and curricula, especially in the preschool and transition years
- Stigma and limited access to mental health services for children and caregivers.
- Shrinking civic space, government restrictions on NGOs, and poor CSO-state collaboration.
- Data fragmentation and lack of coordinated measurement systems in ECD and health sectors.

Key strategic directions for the coming cycle include:

1. **Strengthening Data Systems** to enable evidencedriven policy and programme design.
2. **Expanding Access and Inclusion** by scaling nonformal services, mobile outreach, and community hubs.
3. **Investing in the Workforce** through accredited pre and inservice training and diversifying the profession.
4. **Securing Sustainable Funding** via partnerships, grants, and innovative financing models.
5. **Enhancing Collaboration** across sectors and geographies, leveraging the network's collective expertise.

By pursuing these priorities together, ISSA and its members will continue to advance equity, quality, and social justice in early childhood systems—creating a brighter future for every child and family in our communities.



ISSA Hub-Led Initiatives

Collaborative Impact

The following section highlights achievements led by the ISSA Hub—many of which were implemented in close collaboration with ISSA members. Through targeted interventions and large-scale initiatives, the Hub worked hand-in-hand with members, partners, and governments to advance systemic change, strengthen local capacities, and respond to emerging needs. Whether shaping national curricula, scaling inclusive practices, or equipping professionals on the frontlines, these efforts reflect how Hub leadership, in synergy with the network's expertise, drives impact across the early childhood field.



ISSA Hub-Led Initiatives / Collaborative Impact

Hub-Led Tailored Expert Interventions for System-Level Change and Capacity Building

In 2024, the ISSA Hub led high-impact interventions that translated vision into systemic change strengthening early childhood systems and advancing equity on the ground.

In partnership with **UNICEF ECARO**, the ISSA Hub developed the **Early Childhood Development Toolbox for Local Governments**—an evidence-informed resource helping municipalities **mobilize resources, address inclusion gaps, and deliver equitable, integrated services**. Validated in **10 municipalities across 7 countries**, the Toolbox is now anchoring stronger, more responsive local ECD systems.

As a knowledge partner, the ISSA Hub also partnered with **UNICEF** to strengthen home visiting systems in Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region. The ISSA Hub developed the train the trainers guide and a provided the training of master trainers from Bulgaria, Hungary, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Ukraine on the comprehensive Supporting Families for Nurturing Care resource package of 24 training modules. At country level, the ISSA Hub provided tailored support to UNICEF Office in Azerbaijan in their efforts to strengthen the curriculum and the training provision of home visitors in their country.

In **Tajikistan**, under a larger **World Bank–funded project**, the ISSA Hub was **contracted by the Ministry of Education to develop an advanced school readiness curriculum and training modules**, aligning early education with international quality standards.

In **Bulgaria**, the ISSA Hub supported the **Trust for Social Achievement Foundation (TSA)** in implementing tools from the **ISSA Quality Resource Pack**, delivering training, mentorship, and certification support to equip a national cohort of trainers to advance **inclusive, high-quality learning environments**.

ISSA also contributed to the **European Commission's Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC WG)**, helping shape regional guidance on monitoring and evaluation and address staff shortages across the ECEC sector.



ISSA Hub-Led Initiatives / Collaborative Impact

Hub-Led Large-Scale Initiatives

In 2024, the ISSA Hub led and coordinated a suite of ambitious, multi-country initiatives—delivering systemic impact through strategic partnerships, close collaboration with members, and sustained investment in early childhood systems.

Crisis Response

In response to the war in [Ukraine](#), the ISSA Hub supported the creation and refurbishment of child and family centers, including shelters and kindergartens and non-formal services equipped with playful and learning materials, and backed the Transcarpathian Regional Charitable Fund “Blaho” (Ukraine) in purchasing and rebuilding its center for internally displaced and Roma families. In partnership with municipalities, ISSA members scaled up community-based services—Spynkas (Poland), PrimoHubs (Romania), PlayHubs (Hungary and Slovakia). ISSA also built members' capacity to support municipal early childhood strategies for refugee and Internally Displaced People (IDP) communities.

Integrated ECD at the Local Level

In 2024, ISSA continued expanding its efforts in equipping local governments to lead integrated early childhood strategies that strengthen service coordination, inclusion, and sustainability. Through [the Primokiz approach](#), licensed from the Jacobs Foundation, the initiative expanded to new municipalities in Slovakia and Ukraine, deepened its reach in Hungary, and facilitated knowledge transfer to the Czech Republic—bringing the total number of cities reached across Europe to 50+.

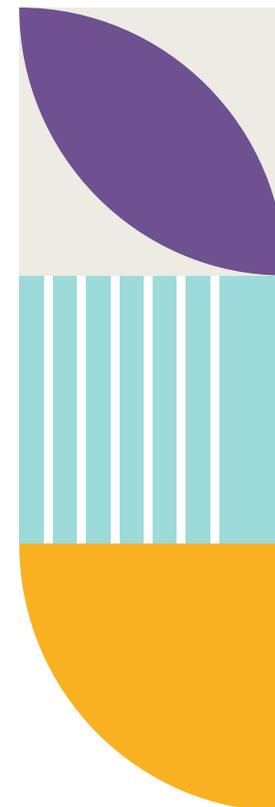
Public Investment for the Early Years

Together with Eurochild, ISSA continued to drive the multi-year [First Years First Priority campaign](#), advocating for increased public investment in early childhood, particularly for children from birth to age three and those in vulnerable situations. The campaign ensured ongoing visibility through newsletters, joint publications, and contributions to Eurochild's 2024 flagship report. Its influence was visible in the European Parliament's adoption of key recommendations.

Workforce Development

The ISSA Hub significantly advanced regional capacity to support the early childhood workforce's mental health and inclusive practices through the Early Childhood Workforce Initiative ([ECWI](#)), funded by the Regional Network Fund. Two major training programs—Psychological First Aid (PFA) and Embracing Diversity (ED)—reached trainers, practitioners, and university staff in over 15 countries, resulting in accreditation and curriculum integration in Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Montenegro, Latvia, Kosovo, and Hungary, and national rollouts.

The ISSA Hub also published two briefs capturing lessons from its 2023 trauma response, reflecting how foundational and



ISSA Hub-Led Initiatives / Collaborative Impact

Hub-Led Large-Scale Initiatives

transformative training on Psychological First Aid and embracing diversity reached **14,000 professionals, 18,000 children**, and 10,000 parents in European and Central Asian countries.

Additionally, ISSA curated 50+ evidence-based resources on the Knowledge Hub and ran the **“Voices from the Field” campaign**, reaching **nearly 2,000 stakeholders**. **Cross-regional events**, co-hosted with its peer regional networks, the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC), the African Network for Early Childhood, and the Arab Network for Early Childhood Development (ANECD), **mobilized nearly 100 organizations**.

Health Systems for Early Child Development

In 2024, the ISSA Hub advanced the **integration of ECD into health systems** by completing and disseminating the final modules in a 24-part resource series, along with a mental health brief for emergency contexts. Co-developed with **WHO and UNICEF**, these resources **equipped health professionals** to deliver holistic, child-centered care. The ISSA Hub also reinforced cross-sector collaboration through its role in the **Health4ECD initiative**, hosting **11 webinars**, sharing **50+ resources**, reaching **6,000+ professionals in 95 countries**, and building a **global community of 1,000+ ECD-focused practitioners**.

Diversity and Inclusion

The **Romani Early Years Network (REYN)** initiative of the ISSA Hub played a strategic role in **advancing equity and support for Roma children and families**. REYN shaped key agendas through EU and Council of Europe consultations, including the Eurochild Convention and the European Platform for Roma Inclusion, and chaired a session at the 18th Council of Europe Dialogue. The **“Breaking the Silence” campaign** mobilized widespread awareness of the invisibility of young Roma children. The ISSA Hub also **co-developed the CHAVORE proposal** with five ISSA Members hosting national REYNs, targeting mental health for Roma children under the **EU-funded CERV programme**.

Gender-Equitable Caregiving and Challenging Norms

In 2024, ISSA strengthened **gender-equitable caregiving related issues** through the **Engaging Men in Nurturing Care (EMiNC)** initiative, funded by the OAK Foundation and led by the ISSA Hub. In **Barcelona, Coimbra, and Naples**, the partners **trained professionals, engaged policymakers**, and **built alliances** to shift norms and embed **gender-balanced caregiving** in both services and homes.

Championing Learning through Play

In parallel, the ISSA Hub collaborated with the **LEGO Foundation and UNICEF** to **scale playful parenting** through webinars, workshops, videos, blogs, and resources, embedding responsive caregiving into early childhood programs worldwide.



ISSA Hub-Led Initiatives / Collaborative Impact

Champions Behind the Change

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the funders, partners, and ISSA members whose unwavering support and collaboration made this year's achievements possible.

Funders

Early Childhood Regional Networks Fund
European Commission
Minderoo Foundation
Oak Foundation

Open Society Foundations
UNICEF
War Child Holland<

ISSA Members who partnered with the ISSA Hub under various initiatives

Association 21 July, Italy
Association of Pedagogical Assistants, Serbia
Centre for Innovation in the Early Years (VBJK), Belgium
Centre for Child Health and Development (CSB), Italy
Center for Educational Initiatives, Latvia
Centrul Step by Step, Romania
Comenius Foundation for Child Development, Poland
Community Educational Foundation "School for All", Kazakhstan
For Our Children Foundation, Bulgaria
Kali Sara – Roma Information Center, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Kosova Education Center (KEC), Kosovo
Open Academy Step by Step, Croatia

Partners Hungary Foundation, Hungary
Platform for Early Care and Development, Czech Republic
Pedagogical Center of Montenegro, Montenegro
Step by Step Centre for Quality in Education at the Education Research Institute, Slovenia
Step by Step Educational Program, Moldova
Transcarpathian Regional Charitable Fund "Blaho", Ukraine
Trust for Social Achievement Foundation, Bulgaria
Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation, Ukraine
Wide Open School, Slovakia

Partners

Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC)
African Early Childhood Network (AfECN)
Arab Network for Early Childhood Development (ANECD)
Center for Social Studies/Observatory of Masculinities, University of Coimbra
CONEXUS
DG JUST – European Commission

EPHA
Eurochild
Eurocities
European Parliament
Minority Initiative
Early Childhood Development Action Network (ECDAN)



ISSA Hub-Led Initiatives / Collective Learning

At the heart of ISSA's mission is a commitment to learning together. In 2024, we deepened this commitment by connecting people, ideas, and practices—convening the field, supporting peer learning, and fueling knowledge exchange to drive collective progress across the early childhood ecosystem.



ISSA Hub-Led Initiatives / Collective Learning

ISSA Conference 2024

In 2024, Sofia, Bulgaria became a global hub for early childhood innovation as ISSA, with the Trust for Social Achievement, hosted the ISSA Conference 2024. The event brought together **450 participants from 50+ countries**, including **ministerial representatives from 13 nations** across key social sectors.

Guided by the theme *"It Takes an Early Childhood Ecosystem for All Young Children to Thrive,"* the conference featured **140+ sessions** across three strands:

- **Speaking Out** – addressing barriers like poverty and conflict
- **Moving Towards** – sharing scalable, inclusive policies and programs
- **Deliberating About** – exploring global risks such as inequality and environmental shifts.

Keynotes by **James Cairns** (Harvard University) and **Mathias Urban** (Dublin City University) called for equity-driven, systems-based ECD and framed early childhood as a *global common good*.

A **policy panel** with ministers from three countries highlighted strategies to improve multi-sectoral coordination. Some pledged to **engage finance ministries earlier** in ECD planning—an encouraging signal of momentum.

Networks like ISSA, ECDAN, ANECD, and national alliances were recognized as vital drivers of systemic change, linking grassroots action to global advocacy and building **resilient, inclusive early childhood systems**.

Marking **25 years of ISSA** and **30 years of the Step by Step Program**, a **plenary** launched **Early Childhood Education in Social and Political Transitions** (Klaus, Peeters, Vona), reflecting the program's lasting influence across 30 countries.

Participants left energized and united by a shared commitment to creating ecosystems where every child can thrive.



ISSA Hub-Led Initiatives / Collective Learning Powering Connections, Fueling Collaboration

In 2024, ISSA sustained cross-border collaboration through its dynamic member community. Even without new funding, earlier investments in peer learning continued to generate local impact.

Peer Learning Activities (PLAs) previously engaged **27 members from 17 countries**, with 143 participants exploring topics like early intervention and Roma workforce inclusion. Though no new PLAs were funded in 2024 by ISSA, members applied shared learning in their contexts and the network Hub connected members with similar interest to apply together for joint projects. **Joint Learning Labs (JLLs)**, held in 2023–2024 with **12 members from 11 countries**, focused on the Persona Doll method and quality in non-formal services. The **ISSA Hub** supported ongoing partnerships that attracted external funding and delivered impact on themes such as **mental well-being, gender-responsive caregiving, and refugee support**—proving the lasting value of collective learning. The Hub also organized numerous member-exclusive events, such as an online learning exchange on the topic of Playful Parenting, as well as a new series of online Member Meet-Up events to discuss topics of joint interest and collaboration opportunities.



ISSA Hub-Led Initiatives / Collective Learning Knowledge Sharing and Knowledge Hubs

ISSA leverages the strengths and expertise of Member organizations and partners to create valuable resources and curate the latest materials to share in ISSA's region and beyond. We currently host **600+ resources and practices** developed by Member organizations and partners, curated in **five online knowledge hubs** focused on specific areas of expertise. In 2024, ISSA continued to foster the generation of knowledge within the network and to facilitate its dissemination through its hosted websites and channels.

[ISSA Knowledge Hub](#)

[Resources for the Ukraine Response](#)

[Romani Early Years Network Knowledge Hub](#)

[Health Systems for Early Child Development Knowledge Hub](#)

[Early Childhood Workforce Initiative Knowledge Hub](#)



2024 Financial Statement (EUR)

ASSETS	2024	2023
Tangible fixed assets	6,070	12,082
Grants receivable	338,322	1,139,270
Other receivables	20,792	236,146
Debtors	101,943	22,836
Liquid assets	822,769	1,164,592
Total	1,289,895	2,574,926

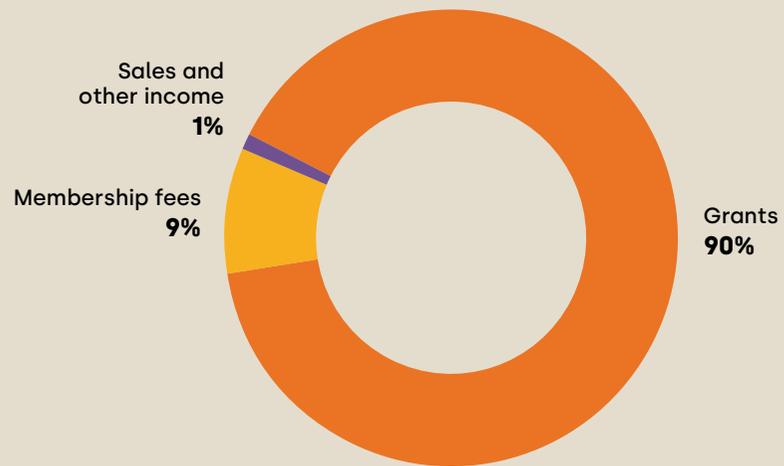
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	2024	2023
Association capital reserve	82,595	58,148
Deferred revenue	1,062,565	2,296,350
Taxes payable	2,124	36,898
Creditors and accrued expenses	142,610	183,529
Total	1,289,895	2,574,926

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE	2024	2023
Grants	2,129,770	2,556,070
Membership fees	32,334	29,086
Sales and other income	215,633	96,841
Donations-in-Kind		2,476,539
Total income	2,377,737	5,158,536
Programs	1,834,592	4,746,369
Administration	382,947	511,504
Fundraising and partnership building	82,502	64,171
Income generation	78,081	56,351
Total expenditure	2,378,122	5,378,395
Net operating income	-385	-219,859
Interest Income	7,732	23,058
Exchange differences	17,100	-640
Net Result	24,447	-197,441

The balance sheet and the income statement are derived from the audited annual financial statements, which are drawn up in accordance with the Guideline for annual reporting C1 'Not-for-profit organizations' of the Dutch Accounting Standards Board.

2024 Financial Statement (EUR)

Income 2024



Expenditure 2024

