

## ACTIVITY REPORT

### ROMANI EARLY YEARS NETWORK BULGARIA 2020



ROMANI  
EARLY YEARS  
NETWORK

## 1. MISSION AND GOALS OF THE NETWORK

The Romani Early Years Network Bulgaria (the REYN Network) was established in January 2018 and is coordinated by “Trust for Social Achievement” Foundation. The REYN Network aims to support professionals working with children from minority communities, in order to increase the scope and quality of the provided services, and in this way unite efforts to advocate for its members. The Network also supports the development of role models from the Roma community.

The main goals of the REYN Network are:

- To develop the expert capacity among the specialists and support staff, who work with the Roma communities in the field of early childhood development;
- To help increase the number of professionals from the Roma community, working to provide services in early childhood;
- Advocate for the provision of fairer and higher quality services to support the creation of more inclusive systems;
- To provide additional opportunities for internships in nurseries and kindergartens for students of Roma origin.

## 2. ACCOMPLISHED ACTIVITIES

- **Membership of Romani Early Years Network Bulgaria** – Currently consists of 249 members. Membership is still completely free.
- **Activities of the REYN Network Advisory Board**



Members of the Advisory Board of the REYN Network are: Spaska Mihaylova (Association “New road”, Hayredin), Silvia Stancheva (Center “Amalipe”, Veliko Turnovo / Shumen), dr. Stefan Stefanov (Association “Thirst for life”, Sliven), Desislava Boshnakova (Kindergarten “Detski svyat”, Gorna Oryahovitsa), Anahid Mihaylova (Kindergarten “Sluntse”, Lukovit), Svetlana Zlateva (Kindergarten “Prolet”, Yambol) and dr. Irena Videnova – RHI, Vratsa.

Within 2020, before the announcement of the COVID - 19 pandemic, several public events were planned and implemented, jointly organized by the team of Center “Amalipe” and “Trust for Social Achievement” Foundation. For the first time, some of the most active members of the REYN Network were actively involved in the process of presenting

successful practices for working with children and families from ethnic minorities, which were presented to a wider audience.



- **Strategic meeting of REYN International in Belgium, Ghent in February 2020** – during the meeting, the main priorities, and tasks on the agenda of the member countries of REYN International were shared. Sharing the good practices, strengths, and weaknesses of each of the 11 countries helped to create a common project – *“Inclusion and justice for Roma children and families”*. According to the project coordinator Alyosha Rudas: “This project will contribute to improving the sustainability of the initiatives within REYN International and its community, its sense of belonging, professionalism and positioning on the international and national stage. The project will also contribute to coordinated and appropriate action, as well as to building on the strengths of the REYN International community as a whole. We are well prepared to meet the needs of Roma communities, and our main goal is to advocate for more supportive and inclusive policies within the EU.”

- **Online discussions of the REYN Network**

Pressed by the negative circumstances caused by COVID-19, the activity of the REYN Network was moved entirely online. Despite the limitations and challenges, the TSA team was able to conduct the following online discussions:

1. Online discussion on the topic: **“What measures will kindergartens take during the resumption of educational activities – 21.05.2020”** – during the meeting, the main challenges for teachers in the process of restoring classes were discussed. The fact that many teachers encounter something completely unfamiliar to them contributed to the organization of the discussion. During the meeting, various ideas and suggestions were shared to contribute to facilitating the process of adaptation to the new educational environment and activities in educational institutions.
2. Online discussion on the topic: **Ideas, comments and suggestions on the content of the proposal submitted to the Ministry of Education and Science for adoption of the “Program for construction, expansion, upgrading and reconstruction of kindergartens and schools for the period 2020-2022”** –

**25.06.2020** – The main purpose of the discussion was entirely advocacy, which contributed to the creation of an opinion on the content of this program, which was sent to the relevant governing bodies on behalf of the entire REYN Network. The discussion helped us to get comments and opinions about the goals and activities of the program, the expected results, its scope, as well as the criteria for eligibility and ranking of the activities under project proposals.

3. Online discussion on the topic: **Discussion of the changes in the Law on Pre-school and School Education – 14.07.2020** – Again the main goal of the discussion was focused on the planning of active advocacy on behalf of the REYN Network. Another main goal of the discussion was to get an expert opinion on the benefits and possible negative effects of teaching four-year-olds in a school environment – a challenge for smaller settlements where there is a school and no kindergarten.
4. Online discussion on the topic: **Achievements and challenges in the framework of projects and initiatives funded by the EU – 16.10.2020** – During the online discussion, the members of REYN Bulgaria shared experiences, achievements, and challenges during their participation in various national programs and projects, funded by the EU Structural Funds. The purpose of the online discussion was to generate new ideas and formulate new activities that we all believe should be supplemented and adopted for funding and implementation by educational institutions in the new program period 2021-2027. The contribution of the REYN Bulgaria members in the online discussion was summarized in a table with comments and recommendations to be included in the process of developing the new operational programs. The proposals were summarized and sent to the European Commission with the assistance of the members of the REYN Advisory Board.
5. **Webinar “How to develop socio-emotional skills at an early age?”** – On 18th November 2020, the REYN Network organized webinar on the topic “How to develop socio-emotional skills at an early age”. The moderator of the event was Ralitsa Popova, the executive director of Association “Znanie” – Lovech, and an institutional member of the REYN Bulgaria Network. She presented successful practices, as well as projects, aimed at developing socio-emotional skills in children, at an early age. The active involvement and participation of the local community in the overall process of building such skills, was pointed out as a successful practice. The main emphasis was placed on the successful interaction between teachers and children, whose mother tongue is different from

Bulgarian and how the environment at kindergarten can affect the development of their linguistic and social skills.

6. **Training of trainers within the program “How raise strong and smart children”** – On 01.12.2020 an online training of trainers was held under the Program for small grants “How to raise strong and smart children”, an initiative of the REYN Network. The training for trainers was organized and conducted with the help of the “Health and Social development” Foundation – HESED, and its main objectives were the following: Getting the trainers acquainted with the content of the brochure on healthy eating and the training manual for pregnant mothers and mothers with children aged 0-3 years, produced within the initiative “How to raise strong and smart children”; Getting the trainers to gain personal experience with some practical elements of the trainings and their connection to the content of the brochure; Forming a community of trainers for the REYN initiative “How to raise strong and smart children”, which shares the values of the project and works for the cause of the healthy eating of children from the Roma community.
- **Launch of the Small Grants Program “How to raise strong and smart children”** – The current REYN Network Small Grants program has the following main objectives:
    1. To increase the parents’ understanding of the importance of early childhood for the formation of the child’s personality and their role in its development.
    2. To increase the knowledge and skills of mothers regarding breastfeeding and healthy eating, depending on the age of the child.
    3. To increase the motivation and desire of mothers to prepare varied and appropriate food for their children by participation in practical sessions with attached recipes.

The implementation of the program for Small Grants “How to raise strong and smart children” at the national level will be carried out by 10 non-governmental organizations, which will include in their projects over 500 pregnant women from the Roma community and mothers with children aged 0-3. The planned trainings for healthy nutrition of pregnant mothers and mothers with children aged 0-3 years will be carried out in the period January-June 2021.

### **3. PLANNED ACTIVITIES IN 2021**

- **Active participation of the REYN Network in the annual conferences and events, organized by Center “Amalipe” in 2021.**
- **Implementation of the program for small grants “How to raise strong and smart children”.**
- **Launch of the initiative “Inclusion and justice for Roma children and families”, funded by the Open Society Foundation, leader of the REYN International initiative.**
- **Organizing online trainings tailored to the needs of the REYN Network members.**
- **Organizing advocacy discussions with the REYN Network members, supported by the Advisory Board.**
- **Translation of materials and collection of good practices** – we will continue to translate video and written materials, supporting the work of various specialists with children from the Roma community. We will involve the REYN Network members in our efforts to gather a database of good practices in educational institutions.
- **Implementation of the Program for national school visits of health and pedagogical specialists** – we will continue the implementation of this program, while complying with the measures imposed to combat the epidemic. The main goal will be to provide an opportunity for specialists with health and pedagogical profile, who work with Roma children, to increase their practical knowledge and skills for providing high quality health and pedagogical care/services.
- **Implementation of the program for joint organization of regional events (online discussions)** – the REYN Network members, together with TSA, will organize half-day regional events, aimed at pedagogical and non-pedagogical specialists, working with children aged 2-6 in kindergartens and preparatory groups in schools. The publications that TSA translated to Bulgarian will be presented at the events, as well as topics that are essential for the direct work of specialists working with children and families from the Roma community.
- **Holding a round table with health professionals to share the results of the Small Grants program “How to raise strong and smart children”** – in addition to sharing the results of the trainings under the initiative, a focus will also be put on the importance of the nutrition of pregnant mothers and mothers with children aged 0-3 years.
- **Organizing events and initiatives related to the importance of building successful role models at an early age.**