

ACTIVITY REPORT
ROMANI EARLY YEARS NETWORK BULGARIA 2019



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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 advocacy efforts 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 to students of Roma origin.

2. PERFORMED ACTIVITIES

- **Members table of Romani Early Years Network Bulgaria** – The Network has 204 members at the end of 2019, approximately 50% of them are institutional and 50% - individual members. At the moment, the membership in the Network is completely free.



- **Regional events of the REYN Network** – Within the month of April, two of the three regional events took place, which were realized in 2019. One of these events was organized by kindergarten “Zornitsa”, Dobrich with the assistance of “Helping Hand” Foundation and the other event was organized by kindergarten No.11 “Elhitsa”, Haskovo. In November 2019, the third regional event took place, which was organized by the team of

kindergarten “Sun” in Lukovit. The events were attended by over 150 teachers, university professors, local government officials and parents. Good teaching practices were presented at the events, which support the theories described in Eric Jensen’s book – “Teaching with poverty in mind” and the brochure “How poverty affects the development of children”, translated and adapted by REYN Bulgaria.

- **Program for national study visits of health, pedagogical specialists, and students** - in 2019 we started the implementation of this program, which is aimed at providing opportunities for improving and enriching teaching methods in a multicultural environment. Eight kindergartens and 16 teachers took part in the program.



- **Anglo-American School in Sofia worked together with the children from the kindergartens in the village of Lesovo and the city of Radomir** – A total of 50 students from the elite Anglo-American School (AAS) in Sofia visited the kindergartens in Radomir and Lesovo, where they worked and created together. After the visits to the kindergartens, the students from AAS also met with the team of TSA, and within half a day discussed the negative consequences of poverty and what its impact is on the development of children.



Internship program

“Role models at an early age” - The program aims to provide opportunities to Roma students to gain practical skills for work in kindergartens in vulnerable communities. In 2019, the program was implemented by 5 organizations: “Future for All” Association, “Concordia Bulgaria” Foundation, “Crime Prevention Fund - IGA”, “Club of nongovernmental organizations – Turgovishte” Association and “World without borders” Association Stara Zagora, which supported a total of 7 Roma students, willing to develop as specialists in the field of early child development.



Translation of the brochure “Can you hear me”

– The brochure “Can you hear me” is the second translated material within the REYN Network. It analyzes the processes of learning a second language and the efforts required by children and teachers in the process of learning and formation of attitudes. During the training of Betsy Grob and Maria Georgiou, the brochure was presented for the first time to the members of REYN Bulgaria.



- **Training on the topic “How should children from vulnerable communities develop their language and socio-emotional skills”** – How can children’s teachers welcome and encourage the richness of the mother tongue and at the same time support bilingual children to improve their knowledge of the Bulgarian language? How can small changes in the organization and design of the classroom have a big impact on language learning and the improvement of children’s language skills in general? These were some of the topics which were presented by the trainers Betsy Grob and Maria Georgiou during the two-day workshop at the branches of kindergarten “Zvezditsa” in the village of Roza, Tundzha municipality and kindergarten “Prolet” No.18 in the village of Bezdenitsa, Montana municipality. The two-day workshops were attended by over 50 teachers from over 20 settlements, who are currently members of the REYN Network.



- **Handbook for healthy eating** – Within 2019, a handbook for healthy eating was developed for pregnant mothers and mothers with children aged 0-3. The main idea of the handbook is to improve the efficiency of the work of health professionals and to offer mothers with children and future children to prepare affordable and at the same time healthy meals for their children. The handbook focuses on the importance of breast milk, the benefits of breastfeeding, the principles of nutrition at different ages of children, as well as many other important issues related to a healthy lifestyle.



- **Experience exchange in Kragujevac, Serbia and Čakovec, Croatia** – In November 2019, 25 teachers from Bulgaria visited several kindergartens in Čakovets, Croatia and Kragujevac, Serbia, attended mainly by Roma children. Both initiatives were organized with the support of the REYN Croatia Network and the REYN Serbia Network. Both Networks work to provide fairer and better services for Roma children.



- **Establishment of the Advisory Board to the REYN Network** – On May 14, 2019, the Advisory Board of the REYN Network was established, which is a permanent advisory body on the issues related to the activities of the REYN Network.

The first advisory board includes Spaska Mihaylova (“New road” Association, Hayredin), Silviya Stancheva (CMEDT “Amalipe”, Veliko Tarnovo/ Shumen), Dr. Stefan Stefanov (“Thirst for life” Association, Sliven), Desislava Boshnakova (Kindergaten “Detski svyat”, Gorna Oryahovitsa), Anahit Mihaylova (Kindergarten “Sun”, Lukovit), Svetlana Zlateva (Kindergarten “Prolet”, Yambol) and Dr. Irena Videnova – RHI, Vratsa.

PLANNED ACTIVITIES IN 2020

- **Participation of the REYN Network in the annual conference of the principals of CMDT “Amalipe” in February 2020.**
- **Organizing focus groups within the REYN Network to discuss the design of the OPNOIR and OPHRD operational programs for the new programming period 2021-2027.**
- **Piloting of the handbook for healthy eating of pregnant women and mothers with children aged 0-3 by NGO in the period from April to June 2020.**
- **Organizing a national conference for the official presentation of the handbook on healthy eating in September 2020.**
- **Participation of the REYN Network during the annual pedagogical conference of Amalipe in April 2020.**
- **Organizing an annual meeting of the members of the REYN Network in June 2020.**
- **Implementation of the Program “Role models at an early age” – we will provide an opportunity for more Roma students, supported by NGOs, to conduct paid internships in a kindergarten, working with vulnerable communities.**
- **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 members of the REYN Network in our efforts to gather a database of good practices in educational institutions.**
- **Implementation of the Program for national study visits of health and pedagogical specialists – this year again we will 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 services.**
- **Implementation of the program for joint organization of regional events – The institutional members of the Network, 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 translated by TSA will be presented at these events:**
 1. The book “Teaching with poverty in mind” by Eric Jensen;
 2. The brochure “How does poverty affects children?” by REYN Croatia.
 3. The brochure “Can you hear me” by REYN Croatia.

- **Conducting a one-day workshop for transformative discussions:** The workshop will focus on learning how to use the transformative discussion process to improve children's understanding of reality and the desire to make a difference in their own lives and for the benefit of others. Teachers and parents will be the main target group for this event.