



INTERNATIONAL  
**STEP by STEP**  
ASSOCIATION



ROMANI  
EARLY YEARS  
NETWORK

# STRATEGY

2017 – 2020

## Contents

1.	THE CAUSE .....	4
1.1.	Narrow understanding of ECEC services .....	4
1.2.	Lack of access to quality services .....	5
1.3.	Unhealthy environment.....	5
1.4.	Lack of trained and diverse workforce.....	6
2.	VISION .....	6
3.	MISSION .....	7
4.	MANDATE AND FOCUS.....	7
5.	MAIN FOCUS AREAS .....	8
5.1.	Strengthening capacities.....	8
5.2.	Advocacy for access to quality services .....	9
5.3.	Advocacy for diversity.....	11
6.	STRATEGIC GOALS.....	11
7.	STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS.....	13
8.	LOGICAL FRAMEWORK.....	17
9.	ACTION PLAN .....	18



## FOREWORD

In 2012 REYN (Romani Early Years Network) was established in response to the growing demand for professional development opportunities for practitioners working with young Romani and Traveller children. Reflecting upon new challenges, but also resulting from greater ambitions, in 2016 REYN reviewed its strategy and broadened its scope to include advocacy at EU level.

For the period 2017-2020, REYN will focus on sustainable solutions for a prepared workforce, improved Romani and Traveller children's access to quality services and increased diversity among the early childhood workforce, including Roma and Traveller professionals. The strategy period was chosen to align with European Union's Roma policy, which affects a wider region and is not restricted to the EU Member States only.

In this document, we outline REYN's plans for the next four years and describe how they fit into a long-term vision and mission of the network. With a growing number of national networks, we also illustrate cooperation among them within the larger international network. As new members and partners join, a global movement is developing which needs strong coordination to benefit from meaningful collaboration and coordinated advocacy efforts.

During the development of this strategy, partners were consulted to align our strategic goals and make the most of the available resources. Despite a primary focus being on civil society and non-governmental organizations, a variety of backgrounds was sought among the experts who provided comments on drafts at various stages. By sharing this document, we invite partners to seek for synergies and alignment with REYN plans for organizations or institutions targeting early childhood education and care or Roma inclusion.

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# 1. THE CAUSE

What REYN wants to change

A significant body of research shows that the first three years of a child's life are of enormous importance to lifelong well-being and success in later life. Still, young Romani and Traveller children are denied the right to access quality early childhood education and care services, stimulating and protective environments, nutrition, equal and quality developmental opportunities, which would enhance their learning and development and open the doors for realizing their full potential.

## 1.1. Narrow understanding of ECEC services

In strategic documents referring to early childhood education and care (ECEC) for Romani and Traveller children, decision makers often focus only on preschool education. Typically, attention in policy measures is paid merely to the one or two years before the start of mandatory schooling, the compulsory preschool year or the so-called 'zero year.' However, in many places, this narrow understanding of ECEC is not restricted to Roma and Travellers only. Most children, regardless of ethnic background, do not have access to services in their early years (birth to three), the most critical for their development. Only three EU countries (Latvia, Lithuania, and Romania) offer 40-hour-a-week services to children aged birth-three free of charge. However, there is no entitlement to the services.<sup>1</sup>

Accurate data for Romani and Traveller children and access to early childhood development services are often lacking, but anecdotal references from REYN members indicate extremely low representation of younger age groups and their families in already scarce and over-subscribed ECEC programs, including home visiting and community-based parenting groups. The 2011 EU Framework<sup>2</sup> encouraged EU Member States to develop national Roma integration strategies (NRIS) and explicitly mentioned the role of early childhood education and care in overcoming barriers for Roma. The Framework referenced the Communication on Early Childhood Education and Care,<sup>3</sup> which covers a broader perspective on ECEC, including engagement of the family and strong links to other policies in housing, health, and other areas. The Member States, however, reacted only with a narrow understanding of ECEC and limited themselves to kindergarten services. Also, after a review of the NRIS commissioned by ISSA<sup>4</sup>, we can conclude that despite the declarations, strategies do not consider early years as crucial, in particular with a focus on the youngest children (0-3 years of age). Governments do not perceive ECEC services as fundamental for breaking the cycle of poverty and exclusion, often limiting them to school preparation.

Romani and Traveller children, especially those from families of low socio-economic status, are often perceived as objects in need of assistance, as opposed to holders of non-negotiable rights. REYN promotes a child rights-based approach to ECEC built on respect and promoting human dignity. Romani and Traveller children, although often victims of discrimination, must not be perceived only as victims, but also as rights-holders.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Akgündüz, Y. E., Ünver, Ö. (2015). The Socio-Economic Dimension of Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe. CARE Project. Utrecht University. Retrieved from: <[http://ecec-care.org/fileadmin/careproject/Publications/reports/D5\\_1\\_The\\_Socio-Economic\\_Dimension\\_of\\_ECEC\\_in\\_Europe.pdf](http://ecec-care.org/fileadmin/careproject/Publications/reports/D5_1_The_Socio-Economic_Dimension_of_ECEC_in_Europe.pdf)>

<sup>2</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020. *European Commission. COM(2011) 173 final, April 5, 2011.* Retrieved from: <<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0173&from=en>>

<sup>3</sup> Communication from the Commission: Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow. *European Commission, COM(2011) 66 final, Brussels, February 17, 2011.* Retrieved from: <<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0066:FIN:EN:PDF>>

<sup>4</sup> Marsh, A. (2016) National Roma Integration Strategies: Early Years Content Survey. Manuscript, on file with ISSA/REYN.

<sup>5</sup> See UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2011). General Comment No. 13 (2011), The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence. 18 April 2011. <[http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/CRC.C.GC.13\\_en.pdf](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/CRC.C.GC.13_en.pdf)>



Also, REYN promotes the holistic approach to ECEC, recognizing that all areas of human growth and development are intimately interrelated and mutually supportive. REYN Strategy 2017 – 2020 endorses the concept of *the whole child* as recognized by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>6</sup>

The child-rights-based approach, as well as the idea of the whole child, are embedded in the European Commission's Recommendation on Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage. The Recommendation among other things encourages the Member States to tackle child poverty and social exclusion, recognize children as independent rights-holders, maintain a balance between universal and targeted policies and ensure focus on children facing multiple disadvantages, such as Roma.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.2. Lack of access to quality services

With growing evidence on the benefits of ECEC, European institutions have focused on early childhood in several strategic documents. In 2002, the Council of the European Union set the so-called 'Barcelona targets' for childcare provision, in which it was defined that at least 90% of children three-to-mandatory-school-age and at least 33% of children under three would benefit from formal childcare by 2010. An assessment of the Barcelona targets in 2010 and 2011 revealed a concerning trend, particularly for the youngest children: in eight EU countries, the levels of enrolment are below 10%, in four more it remains below 20%, and seven more are still below the target of 33% for birth-to-three-year-old children.<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that these numbers take into account any limited number of childcare hours, therefore for full-time services the percentages would be significantly worse.

Reflecting the level of discrimination, the situation for Romani children is even poorer than in the general population. According to the World Bank report from 2012, the level of enrolment of Romani children in preschool facilities remains significantly lower than that of their non-Romani peers. It may be more than double for most countries with sizeable Romani populations, except Hungary (where preschool education is compulsory for all children). The biggest differences were witnessed in the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, with only 28% and 24% of Romani children are enrolled alongside the national averages of 79% and 72% respectively.<sup>9</sup>

## 1.3. Unhealthy environment

Many factors outside kindergartens or formal education facilities nurture early childhood development, and it often starts with the family environment. Based on the extensive evidence, an article in the world-renowned health journal, *The Lancet*<sup>10</sup>, identified several of the most important biological and psycho-social risk factors for early childhood development, such as chronic under-nutrition, iron and iodine deficiency, poverty, poor caregiver-child interaction, maternal depression, poor learning environment, and more. Health data show that Roma children are hospitalized for pneumonia and respiratory illnesses far more frequently than children from mainstream backgrounds.<sup>11</sup> Children who start behind, stay behind. Opportunity gaps and consequently achievement gaps in early childhood tend to widen in subsequent years. It is critical to reducing these

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF (2014). Protecting children's rights. Convention on the Rights of the Child. 19 May 2014. Retrieved from: <[https://www.unicef.org/crc/index\\_protecting.html](https://www.unicef.org/crc/index_protecting.html)>

<sup>7</sup> European Commission (2013). Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage. *Recommendations. Official Journal of the European Union*. 20 February 2013 (2013/112/EU). Retrieved from: <<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013H0112&from=EN>>

<sup>8</sup> European Commission (2013). Barcelona Objectives. The development of childcare facilities for young children in Europe with a view to sustainable and inclusive growth. *DG Justice*. ISBN 978-92-79-29898-1, doi:10.2838/43161. Retrieved from: <[http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/documents/130531\\_barcelona\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/documents/130531_barcelona_en.pdf)>

<sup>9</sup> World Bank (2012). Toward an Equal Start: Closing the Early Learning Gap for Roma Children in Eastern Europe. *Washington*. <[http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTROMA/Resources/RomaECD\\_FinalReport.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTROMA/Resources/RomaECD_FinalReport.pdf)>

<sup>10</sup> Walker SP, Wachs TD, Grantham-McGregor S, Black MM, Nelson CA, Huffman SL, Baker-Henningham H, Chang SM, Lozoff B, Meeks-Gardner JM, Powell CA, Rahman A, and Richter L. (2011) Child Development 1: Inequality in early childhood: risk and protective factors for early child development. *Lancet*, 378: 1325-1338.

<sup>11</sup> Bennet. J. (2012). Roma Early Childhood Inclusion. The RECI Overview Report. *UNICEF*. Retrieved from: <<https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/Roma-Early-Childhood-Inclusion-Report-20120813.pdf>>



deficiencies in early life by reducing risk factors and reinforcing protective factors<sup>12</sup> such as proper nutrition, responsive and nurturing parenting, safe and stimulating environments, health care, quality early childhood development programs, and adequate family income. Unfortunately, all this research is not translated into strategic documents, action plans, and practices, and Romani and Traveller parents and primary caregivers continue to lack adequate support through health, social services, and child protection services.

#### 1.4. Lack of trained and diverse workforce

Research shows that having a more qualified ECD workforce is a key factor in ensuring high-quality services.<sup>13</sup> *The European Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care*<sup>14</sup> (2014) underlines the contribution that the ECEC workforce makes towards enhancing the pedagogical quality of services for young children, starting from birth. It states that “professional development has an enormous impact on the quality of staff pedagogy and children’s outcomes.”

Moreover, access and the quality of services can grow by ensuring more diversity in the workforce, by including more Roma and Travellers into the ECD workforce, alongside other groups from the wider society. This way the diversity of the workforce can reflect the diversity of the population. Currently, there are very few Roma and Travellers working as ECD professionals or paraprofessionals, with many of them working in services provided by non-governmental organizations, or on the lowest steps of the “career ladder.” Opportunities for Romani and Traveller graduates to become ECD professionals are limited, often by discrimination and other factors. Also, they lack adequate motivation due to low rates of remuneration and the little reputation of the profession.

A 2016 *Study on Diversity within the Teaching Profession with Particular Focus on Migrant and/or Minority Background*<sup>15</sup> has demonstrated difficulties with the lack of data on the teaching workforce, especially with regards to their migrant or minority backgrounds. Also, limited data is hard to compare at international level. Where data was available, the study reported high under-representation<sup>16</sup> of migrants in the workforce in countries with large migrant populations (DK, DE, IE, IT, PT, UK) and under-representation in countries with smaller migrant populations (EE, HU, LV, LT, SK, RO). The study reported a more proportionate representation of national minorities, especially in Central and Eastern Europe (HR, EE, LV, LT, RO), but indicated that often this is at schools for minorities. The study fails to separate particular backgrounds and evaluates minorities altogether. There are reasons to believe, that while minority representation is right, the number of Roma and Travellers in the teaching workforce lags behind.

## 2. VISION

What REYN wants to achieve

REYN’s vision is a society where Romani and Traveller young children, and all children in Europe, benefit from quality, inclusive and competent early childhood education and care

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Lazzari, A.; Peeters, J.; Vandenbroeck, M., *The early years’ workforce: A review of European research and good practices on working with children from poor and migrant families’*, Background paper for the Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years in New York, 10–12 July 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Working Group on Early Childhood Education (2014), *Proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care. Under the auspices of European Commission*. Retrieved from: <[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-quality-framework\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-quality-framework_en.pdf)>

<sup>15</sup> Donlevy, V., Meierkord, A., Rajania, A. (2016). *Study on Diversity within the Teaching Profession with Particular Focus on Migrant and/or Minority Background. European Commission, ECORYS*, Brussels. ISBN: 978-92-79-57979-0. DOI: 10.2766/873440. Retrieved from: <[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/education/library/study/2016/teacher-diversity\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/library/study/2016/teacher-diversity_en.pdf)>

<sup>16</sup> Share of teaching staff of migrant origin being less than half that of the learner population.



systems. The means to achieve this by 2025, involves a qualified ECD workforce with adequate representation of Roma and Traveller professionals in intercultural formal and non-formal educational settings, alongside responsible and accountable governance and family support.

### 3. MISSION

What REYN wants to be

REYN's mission until the end of 2020 is to become:

1. A European-wide leading advocacy network for increasing access for Romani and Traveller children to quality ECD services and for increasing the representation of Romani and Traveller professionals in the ECD workforce; and
2. A go-to hub of knowledge for practitioners and advocates working with and for Romani and Traveller children in countries where national Romani Early Years Networks exist and elsewhere.

### 4. MANDATE AND FOCUS

How REYN will operate and what will be its focus

This new strategy proposes three shifts in REYN's Mandate:

- Move from being a network focused solely on nurturing the capacities of professionals and paraprofessionals working with Romani and Traveller children and their families and communities, to a network catalyzing advocacy actions at a European level, and elsewhere, impacting national levels;
- Move from being a network of individuals to a network of individuals and organizations active in the early years Roma inclusion field;
- Move from an initiative that operates on its own to an initiative that conducts advocacy building on synergies with national REYNs and creates strategic partnerships with targeted organizations for achieving its goals and fulfilling its mission.

To benefit from synergies between the initiatives of international REYN and the national networks, REYN has to develop active cooperation among them. Until recently, national networks operated autonomously and prepared their strategies, in line with the strategy of their host organization. While this new strategic framework for REYN international will not limit the autonomy of host organizations, a certain level of coordination between strategies of national networks and international network will be sought. That is why the early involvement of national networks was crucial in the process of designing this strategy.

In the previous years, when REYN's primary focus was the provision of professional development opportunities for practitioners working with and for Roma children and their families, members of the network benefited from capacity-building activities such as training, workshops and study visits. This orientation also influenced the decision to seek individual membership. Now, as REYN broadens its scope and mandate, its impact can be stronger by changing the profile of its membership.

As of January 2017, REYN will develop two types of affiliations with the network:

- a) Continuing **membership for individuals**, which is suitable for individual supporters, especially in situations when their institutions would not, for any reason, want to declare open support to REYN by becoming a partner;



- b) **Partnership** aimed primarily at organizations and institutions, in circumstances when an entire organization is committed to REYN's cause and mandate, this will include NGOs or early childhood facilities.

## 5. MAIN FOCUS AREAS

The 2017-2020 Strategy proposes **three complementary focus areas**:

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

### 5.1. Strengthening capacities

This area continues to be one of the main areas of work but with a stronger emphasis on enhancing the unique nature of REYN as a network focusing on promoting professionalism and cultural sensitivity in early years services, not limited to kindergarten practitioners. The capacity-strengthening area will work to consolidate the advocacy work/skills of the national network members and to strengthen national REYNs capacity to implement ECD initiatives at the national level. A few areas of interest to be pursued regarding capacity building and advocacy could be: promoting respect for diversity, working with bilingual learners, preparing future practitioners to work with second language learners, enriching the ECEC curriculum with experiences promoting diversity and inclusion. To a large extent, this area will be demand-driven, based on the national REYN's needs and the national action plans.

Also, this area of work will consolidate REYN's position as a knowledge hub allowing the flow of information and exchange of experience between national and international organizations as well as among national networks,<sup>17</sup> including groups in countries where REYN networks have not (yet) been established. The repository of knowledge will feature mainly country efforts to inspire professionals across Europe to work with Romani children, families, and communities. The online hub will be the REYN's standalone platform. The activities geared towards its constituency will be mainly online (e.g. webinars, a repository of resources/promising practices-filtered search, advocacy tools from partners and REYN members on the website, exchange of news through newsletters, etc.) and in-person workshops if/when needed, depending on funding available.

Capacity building of the ECD workforce also needs to be included in strategic plans of governments and will be linked to advocacy area of focus in many ways. For instance, Slovakia has recently launched a program, as part of which more than €30 million of European Social Fund resources will be invested into building new kindergartens aimed at Romani communities. With preference to 150 municipalities selected by the *underdevelopment index*<sup>18</sup> more than 1,000 municipalities have access to these funds and can build a new kindergarten

<sup>17</sup> This has been indicated by the national networks as a highly valued role of REYN. The international level of the network is perceived by national networks as possible vehicle to have their concerns heard by international organizations. An idea often repeated in the interviews was particular support to regional cooperation, which has already been started by some national networks, e.g. in Western Balkans (because of language and cultural similarities) or in Italy (with the need to bring in experience of working with Roma from countries with stronger history in this regard).

<sup>18</sup> Developed and adopted by the government to identify municipalities with most significant need of intervention.



until 2020.<sup>19</sup> It will be essential that the new facilities provide quality services through qualified and well-prepared workforce, including Romani professionals.

## 5.2. Advocacy for access to quality services

Advocacy at the European level is a new area of work for REYN. The need to ensure the accessible provision and reinforce quality from birth to the start of compulsory schooling was repeatedly recognized in some policy documents, commencing with the Council Conclusions on Efficiency and Equity in European Education and Training Systems.<sup>20</sup> Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe report claims that higher participation of children from disadvantaged backgrounds is among the EU's top priorities.<sup>21</sup> The *Europe 2020 Strategy*<sup>22</sup> and the *Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020)* highlighted that "Early Childhood Education and Care is an essential foundation for successful lifelong learning, social integration, personal development and later employability; therefore it is important to develop and invest in it."<sup>23</sup> As a result, the Communication from the Commission on Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow<sup>24</sup> followed by Council conclusions<sup>25</sup> invites the Member States to invest more in ECEC, as this provides best returns. *The Proposal for Key Principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care*<sup>26</sup> (ECEC), developed by the Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care under the auspices of the European Commission in 2014, is the principal document in Europe for the discussions around the quality of ECEC systems.

A key strategic document for state policies towards Roma in many countries, including those where there is a REYN national network, is the *National Roma Integration Strategy* based on the *EU Framework for Roma Integration Strategies*.<sup>27</sup> All EU Member States developed their national Roma integration strategies and many other countries, especially those in the process of EU pre-accession (Serbia, in particular) developed strategies along similar principles. Members of REYN and coordinators of national networks were often directly involved in the preparatory process of national policy (e.g. in Serbia, Kosovo) or its external review (e.g. in

<sup>19</sup> "Obce s rómskou komunitou môžu dostať 33 miliónov eur na stavbu škôlok" *TASR, November 15, 2016*. Retrieved from:

<<http://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/obce-s-romskou-komunitou-mozu-dostat/228276-clanok.html>>

<sup>20</sup> European Commission (2006). Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems. Communication from the Commission to the Council and to the European Parliament of 8 September 2006, COM(2006) 481 final. Retrieved from: <<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/LT/TXT/?uri=URISERV:c11095>>

<sup>21</sup> European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014. Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe. 2014 Edition. Eurydice and Eurostat Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union Retrieved from: <[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/key\\_data\\_series/166EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/key_data_series/166EN.pdf)>.

Research reveals that socioeconomic status of children's parents has a big influence for cognitive, social and emotional children's development. The effects already exist between children at the age of 3 and they tend to become even stronger by the age of 5 (European Commission, 2011, EQUALSOC Network, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> European Commission (2010). EUROPE2020. A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Brussels, March 3, 2010. COM(2010) 2020, Retrieved from: <<http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf>>

<sup>23</sup> Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020') (2009/C 119/02). Retrieved from: <<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:119:0002:0010:EN:PDF>>

<sup>24</sup> European Commission (2011). Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow. Brussels, February 17, 2011. COM(2011) 66 final. Retrieved from: <<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0066:FIN:EN:PDF>>

<sup>25</sup> Council of the European Union (2011). Council conclusions on early childhood education and care: providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow. 9424/11, EDUC 85, SOC 368, SAN 83. Retrieved from: <<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/11/st09/st09424.en11.pdf>>

<sup>26</sup> Working Group on Early Childhood Education (2014), Proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care. *Under the auspices of European Commission*

<sup>27</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020. Brussels, 5 April 2011, COM(2011) 173 Final. Retrieved from: <<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0173&from=en>>



Slovakia<sup>28</sup>). In the interviews conducted with national coordinators, it was often mentioned that while the strategy includes good intentions, the underlying deficit is the absent implementation; this is confirmed by the European Commission reports on the implementation of the National Strategies as well.

In 2016, ISSA commissioned a review of the national strategies with a particular focus on Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, UK (especially Wales). The review also made some comparative reference to Council of Europe members which are pre-accession states (Turkey, Ukraine) and Kosovo. The survey strongly suggested that early years and early childhood development services are missing in the National Strategies. Another strong criticism is the lack of dialogue with civil society in the design of the strategies, which are typically based on needs analyses, or assumptions of needs of communities, while priority should be given to rights-based programs.<sup>29</sup>

In its December 2016 conclusions, the Council of European Union recognized that “despite the measures taken by the Member States, only limited progress has been made in advancing Roma integration, in particular at the local level.”<sup>30</sup>

In addressing these issues, REYN can play a significant role at the international level in cooperation with local partners:

- 1) Advocating for more (and multi-sectoral) focus on early childhood development and care for Romani and Traveller children in EU strategic documents,
- 2) Advocating for more (and more effective) financial allocations to ECD for Roma by the European Union (including pre-accession funds for non-Member States),<sup>31</sup>
- 3) Advocating for inclusion of ECD services for Romani and Traveller children in the recent initiative for the Western Balkans and Turkey – Roma Integration 2020,<sup>32</sup> and
- 4) Supporting national networks in their advocacy efforts at a national and local level to include ECD services for Romani children in national and local policy measures.

As opposed to an ethnic focus on Roma and Travellers, REYN promotes the **progressive universalism model**, which suggests universal provision with additional services for those in need of a particular approach. In practice, REYN stands for an overall increase of quality in ECEC services for all children, while collecting evidence to monitor whether services also improved for disadvantaged groups, including Roma and Travellers.

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<sup>28</sup> Slovak Governance Institute and Wide Open School (2014). Externé hodnotenie Stratégie SR pre integráciu Rómov do roku 2020. April 2014, sponsored by the Office of Government's Plenipotentiary for Romani Communities.

<[http://www.minv.sk/swift\\_data/source/romovia/galerie/Externe\\_hodnotenie\\_strategia.pdf](http://www.minv.sk/swift_data/source/romovia/galerie/Externe_hodnotenie_strategia.pdf)>

<sup>29</sup> Marsh, A. (2016) National Roma Integration Strategies: Early Years Content Survey. *Manuscript, on file with ISSA/REYN.*

<sup>30</sup> Council of European Union (2016). Accelerating the Process of Roma Integration – Council Conclusions (8 December 2016). 15406/16. <<http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15406-2016-INIT/en/pdf>>

<sup>31</sup> This has been indicated as a priority by representatives of the national networks during the consultations via interviews. E.g. in Kosovo, there has recently been a very specific call launched and investments made on school dropout, as this was identified as a key issue in the country. Representatives of national network believe that similar advocacy can be done for ECD.

<sup>32</sup> Roma Integration 2020 was launched on 9 June 2016 by the Regional Cooperation Council, Open Society Foundations and the European Commission. <[http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/news\\_corner/news/2016/06/20160609\\_2\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/news_corner/news/2016/06/20160609_2_en.htm)>



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What makes REYN unique is the focus on Early Childhood Education and Care in its broader sense. Feedback from regional networks and REYN members indicates that without REYN's advocacy there is a risk that the discourse on services for Romani and Traveller children will be limited only to the provision of access to kindergarten education (without a concern for quality) or the introduction of the 'zero' year as a measure to compensate for all missed development.

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### 5.3. Advocacy for diversity

**For Roma and Travellers, opportunities for a professional career in the early childhood education and care field are limited.** The low number of Roma and Travellers in the ECD workforce continues to be a challenge for many reasons. In several countries, support of university students is provided and studying pedagogy is encouraged. For instance, Roma Education Fund annually supports around 1400 Roma students in 16 countries at universities, and its high school scholarship program are gaining growing support from governments in some countries. However, support for earlier in education is non-existent in many regions, and only small shares of Roma reach high schools.<sup>33</sup>

Non-governmental organizations often provide internships for young Roma graduates to attract them to the profession, and several of the national networks have already started or are starting to provide internship opportunities. However, these are very expensive and still do not guarantee the job – thus cannot serve as examples of bringing more Romani or Traveller professionals into the workforce.

Over the past decades, within many programs and initiatives in countries, some new professions/positions were created for working with Romani families or children. These include Roma mediators, pedagogical assistants, health mediators, 'local Roma coordinators' working with families and more. Some of these positions are managed and subsidized by state or local municipalities, but mostly they are NGO initiatives and do not guarantee sustainability. Data on these professions disaggregated by ethnicity are lacking.<sup>34</sup>

On attracting more Roma and Travellers into ECD workforce, REYN will principally focus on advocacy for sustainable positions and balanced qualification requirements. By these focuses, REYN addresses issues of too much training or excessive qualification prerequisites individuals from communities may be facing when in or applying for a position of mediator, assistant or other.

## 6. STRATEGIC GOALS

REYN aims at:

- I. Strengthened capacities of ECD professionals working with Romani and Traveller children*

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<sup>33</sup> For instance, in Kosovo, no systemic support is provided to early education or primary education. In Italy, Roma with higher education are extremely scarce.

<sup>34</sup> In Serbia, several ministries and governmental departments (e.g. office for human rights) have programs for Roma volunteers, but records on where these people go after finishing their volunteering are missing.



Strategic Goal 1: Strengthen the capacity of national networks to become key actors on Roma and Traveller early childhood inclusion, through tailored, demand-driven professional development opportunities.

Under this goal, REYN will focus on intercultural education and bilingual education as well as general quality principles promoted by ISSA, the host of REYN. These will include for example *Quality Framework for Birth-to-Three Services, Training Modules for Home Visitors*,<sup>35</sup> approaches and practices for embracing diversity, and more.

Strategic Goal 2: Become a go-to knowledge and advocacy hub for practitioners and professionals across Europe working for and with Romani and Traveller children, families and communities.

Under this goal, REYN will develop a stand-alone online platform ([www.reyn.info](http://www.reyn.info)) where the mutual exchange between national networks will be facilitated, and the flow of information from national networks to international organizations will be promoted. A repository of studies, reports, policy documents focusing on Romani and Traveller ECEC will be set-up with support from REYN members and national REYNs, and thematic issues aimed at promoting quality and inclusive services will be featured with practice-based examples from various countries.

## II. *Increased access to quality early childhood services for Romani and Traveller children*

Strategic Goal 3: Achieve stronger presence of quality ECD services in pro-inclusion policies targeting Roma and Travellers; effectively attract attention to Romani and Traveller children in general ECD policies.

Under this goal, REYN will advocate for Council of European Union Conclusions on accessible and quality early childhood education and care services for Roma, as well as the inclusion of ECD into EU Roma policy after 2020, the involvement of Romani and Traveller children into the evaluation of European Targets 2020, and more. Series of advocacy meetings will be organized with EU decision makers, followed by targeted country-level advocacy action for targeted use of EU funds and implementation of EU policies, with a particular focus on pre-accession countries.

REYN will also promote the stronger commitment of governments under the European Semester, which provides a framework for coordination of economic policies and implementation of the *Europe 2020* strategy, which lists fight against poverty and social exclusion among its priorities.

Strategic Goal 4: Include early childhood education and care services from birth to 6 in the European Commission's annual review of the national Roma integration strategies.

Reflecting upon the current narrow focus of the policies on one-year preschool education, REYN will promote broader perspectives and implementation of EC recommendations on ECD into Roma integration strategies. Available data will be analyzed in cooperation with specialized institutions (e.g. EU Fundamental Rights Agency) on infant mortality, low birth-weight, stunted development, rates of illnesses, access to parenting program and social

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<sup>35</sup> Developed by ISSA and UNICEF.



welfare, exposure to domestic violence and other factors influencing early childhood development.

### III. *More diversity in ECD practice and workforce, including Roma and Travellers*

Strategic Goal 5: Support the development of measures and policies to attract and retain more Roma and Travellers in the ECD workforce through an advocacy campaign and mobilizing national alliances and partnerships.

In two countries REYN will cooperate with local partners and develop strategies to attract more Roma into ECD workforce, primarily under general pro-diversity policies. While these pilots will be implemented only in two countries, the knowledge will be shared through the network and, in cooperation with national networks, it will be used in international campaigns. Diversity will be promoted not only among staff but also in practice, i.e. in pedagogical models used, the involvement of families, communities, and others.

Strategic Goal 6: Promote the roles of Roma and Travellers in assisting professions to become resource persons for bilingual education, inclusive learning, and social justice.

In two countries REYN will develop programs in which Romani and Traveller professionals in assisting professions (pedagogical assistants, health mediators, others) will first receive additional training and then serve as resource people for their colleagues on the promotion of bilingual learning, inclusive education and social justice.

## 7. STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Who are the partners of REYN?

For achieving its strategic goals, REYN will engage in strategic partnerships with national and international organizations active in the field of Roma inclusion. These partnerships will aim at joining forces towards common goals for REYN and its partners.

The profiles of potential REYN partners vary. They include non-governmental organizations working at an international level (Roma Education Fund - REF), networks of NGOs (European Roma Grassroots Organizations Network - ERGO), foundations (Fundacio Secretariado Gitano - FSG, Open Society Foundations - Roma Initiatives Office - RIO), international agencies (UNICEF), networks of foundations (European Foundation Centre - EFC), networks of professionals (National Association of Teachers of Travellers and Other Professionals – NATT+), youth organizations (Phiren Amenca), Romani NGOs working on ECD issues at national level, and more. Depending on the partners' target group and main area of work, REYN will engage with specific partners under the three areas indicated above.

REYN will continue to join various consortia to implement projects that will contribute to achieving all six Strategic Goals. As an example, currently, ISSA/REYN is part of a large research consortium (17 partners, of which 16 are universities and research institutes) implementing a three-year project on early childhood inclusion and migrants in Europe. The initiative is realized under the Horizon 2020 program of the European Commission, providing technical assistance and support regarding the Roma population.



I. *Strengthening the capacities of ECD professionals working with Romani and Traveller children*

Strategic Goal 1:

Strengthen the capacity of national networks to become key actors on Roma and Traveller early childhood inclusion, through tailored, demand-driven professional development opportunities.

The partnerships under this goal will be channeled towards providing national networks with the support needed for strengthening their capacity to implement their action plans. Webinars will be used as one of the primary tools for professional development and the REYN website as a source of knowledge and exchange of resource between REYN members. Matching the needs of national networks with the expertise of partners will be essential to achieving this strategic goal.

*Examples – current initiatives:*

For the years 2017 – 2018, ISSA/REYN together with four national networks are partnering in the “TOY for Inclusion: Community Based Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) for Roma children” project, aimed at strengthening the position of networks in their own countries by bringing innovative approaches in working inter-generationally within Romani communities.

ISSA/REYN have recently developed a partnership with the World Forum Foundation to support leadership of ECD practitioners through the Global Leaders for Young Children program. ISSA is a partner for the World Forum Foundation to develop leadership in the Europe Region, with a primary focus on those from Roma/Traveller backgrounds. REYN will be central to this effort.

Strategic Goal 2:

Become a go-to knowledge and advocacy hub for practitioners and professionals across Europe working for and with Romani and Traveller children, families and communities.

The partnerships under this goals will be geared towards national REYNs, REYN members and all REYN partners as sources of information (news) and resources (campaigns, studies, practice-based examples, advocacy tools, etc.) which would provide sources of inspiration and empowerment for country actors on issues related to the strategic goals. Partners will be encouraged and supported to share the resources and, if funds are available and where applicable, translate and localize the resources.

II. *Advocating at European level for access to quality early childhood services for Romani and Traveller children*

Strategic Goal 3:

Achieve stronger presence of quality ECD services in pro-inclusion policies targeting Roma and Travellers; effectively attract attention to Romani and Traveller children in general ECD policies.

Under this strategic goal, many organizations expressed their willingness to join REYN in advocating for access to quality services for young Romani and Traveller children **at the level of the European Union**, where most of the advocacy organizations are active. FSG, RIO, ERGO as well as EFC are open to join advocacy efforts and offer their experience, contacts, and networks. Some reach outside of the EU, e.g. the European Foundation Centre includes a particular group focusing on **Central Asia** with Roma inclusion as one of the topics.



Some organizations, especially OSF's Roma Initiatives Office or European Roma Grassroots Organizations Network, believe that they can use locally collected information and evidence for advocacy efforts. For instance, information can be utilized within efforts related the currently open **infringement proceedings for segregation of Roma** in education in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia or investments of European Union in regional development affecting Roma.

Regarding the direct action, Roma Education Fund, through its network at the country level, can play a unique role in supporting activities in particular regions, where help is needed to introduce early childhood services and to lobby for support from the state and other stakeholders.

Other key partners at the European level will be identified further through consultations with existing partners and with other organizations who have been successful in their advocacy work (e.g. Eurochild and its members, contacts from the UNICEF Country Offices, Aflatoun and its partners from various European countries, etc.). REYN will closely cooperate with Eurochild to bring the expertise on Roma to joint advocacy efforts and campaigns on increased access to quality ECD services for all children.

**Strategic Goal 4:**

Include early childhood education and care services from birth to 6 in the European Commission's annual review of the national Roma integration strategies.

In close cooperation with partners like OSF-ECP, OSF-RIO, OSF Brussels office, REF, ERGO, and together with national REYN and members' organizations, REYN will make the case for the need to include ECEC services from birth to six years old in the annual monitoring of the national Roma integration strategies by the European Commission (DG Justice). Additional key partners for lobbying at DG Justice, alongside with DG Employment (in particular e.g. on the Youth Guarantee, a tool promoting employment of young graduates), and DG Education (especially on the use of opportunities offered by Erasmus+) will be identified through consultations with partners.

*III. Advocacy for diversity in the ECD practice and workforce, including Roma and Travellers*

**Strategic Goal 5:**

Support the development measures and policies to attract and retain more Roma and Travellers in the ECD workforce through an advocacy campaign and mobilizing national alliances and partnerships.

Increasing the number of Romani and Traveller staff among preschool and primary educators, and also among the workforce in other sectors is a long-term goal and needs local solutions depending on the country context/system. ISSA/REYN will explore a partnership with REF for providing scholarships for ECD-related professions.

For significant achievements during the four-year strategy, REYN will work in two countries to lay the foundations for setting up mechanisms to attract, support the access to, and retain Roma youngsters in an ECD career. Before the pilots, research will be conducted to map what strategies have been used to diversify the workforce by including Roma and Travellers or other minority groups. Also, a mapping of existing Roma and Traveller actors in ECEC systems will be carried out with support from national REYNs and REF. Literature review on available large-scale studies<sup>36</sup> will be used to transfer existing knowledge into the pilot projects. Lessons learned in these two pilots will be shared with other

<sup>36</sup> Donlevy, V., Meierkord, A., Rajania, A. (2016). Study on the diversity within the teaching profession with particular focus on migrant and/or minority background. Directorate-General for Education and Culture, Education and Training, European Commission. Retrieved from: <[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/education/library/study/2016/teacher-diversity\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/library/study/2016/teacher-diversity_en.pdf)>



countries, so that the model can be adapted and replicated by REYN National Networks and other stakeholders.

In two selected countries, REYN will work with the principal partners on creating a national alliance committed to this goal. Potential local partners will include local NGOs with experience in promoting and supporting Roma actors in the ECE profession, pre-service institutions, local governments, Roma activist organizations, the media, and others.

The two countries will be selected in consultation with partners and the REYN national networks, considering where the most fertile ground is for launching such a pilot (i. e. where are the strongest changes for creating an alliance as described above). Lessons learned from the pilot will be disseminated in the REYN network and among partners to inspire and support similar efforts in more countries.

Strategic Goal 6: Promote roles of Roma and Travellers in assisting professions to become resource people for bilingual education, inclusive learning, and social justice.

In achieving this goal, the most important partnership is with the respective national networks. Close cooperation with administrative bodies is envisaged, e.g. line ministries or other institutions in charge of the professional development of ECD workforce.



## 8. LOGICAL FRAMEWORK

How is REYN going to achieve its goals?

AREA OF FOCUS	STRATEGIC GOALS	OUTCOMES	POTENTIAL PARTNERS
Strengthened capacities of ECD professionals working with Romani and Traveller children	1. Strengthen the capacity of national networks to become key actors on Roma early childhood inclusion, through tailored, demand-driven professional development opportunities	National networks equipped to enhance the ability of practitioners to deliver quality services for Romani and Traveller children	National networks and international partners: ERGO, OSF, RIO, REF
	2. Become a go-to knowledge and advocacy hub for practitioners and professionals across Europe working for and with Romani and Traveller children, families and communities.	An online reference platform for Romani and Traveller Inclusive ECD services.	National networks and international partners: OSF, REF, ERGO, Eurochild
Increased access to quality early childhood services for Romani and Traveller children	3. Achieve stronger presence of quality ECD services in pro-inclusion policies targeting Roma and Travellers; effectively attract attention to Romani and Traveller children in general ECD policies	Improved monitoring and evaluation, and efficiently better implementation of policies and strategies primarily focused on Roma or ECD.	National networks, EU Roma Policy Coalition <sup>37</sup> , Eurochild
	4. Include early childhood education and care services from birth to 6 in the European Commission's annual review of the national Roma integration strategies	National Roma integration strategies include measures and policies aimed at integrated ECEC services from birth to 6 among the key measures for Roma inclusion.	National networks, REF, Eurochild
More diversity in ECD practice and workforce, including Roma and Travellers	5. Support the development measures and policies to attract and retain more Roma and Travellers in the ECD workforce through an advocacy campaign and mobilizing national alliances and partnerships.	Two countries with action in place for attracting, facilitating access and retaining Romani and Traveller in the workforce of the preschool and primary school system.	REF, NATT+, Phiren, Amenca
	6. Promote roles of Roma and Travellers in assisting professions (pedagogic assistants, health mediators, others) to become resource persons for bilingual education, inclusive learning, and social justice.	Pilot training in two countries with 20 participants in each (TBD)	National networks in respective countries

<sup>37</sup> The member organizations are: Amnesty International (AI) (co-chair); European Network Against Racism (ENAR); European Roma Grassroots Organisation (ERGO) (chair); European Roma Information Office (ERIO); European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) (co-chair); Minority Rights Group International (MRGI); Open Society Foundations (OSF); Policy Center for Roma and Minorities; Roma Education Fund (REF) and Fundacion Secretariado Gitano (FSG).



## 9. ACTION PLAN

What do we do in 2017 – 2020

*Strategic Goal 1: Strengthen the capacity of national networks to become key actors on Roma early childhood inclusion, through tailored, demand-driven professional development opportunities*

SPECIFIC TASK		QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS	TIMELINE
1.1	Continue to provide support for peer learning activities (PLAs) for organizations to exchange experience in provision of professional development opportunities for local practitioners	Three per year, involving at least 9 REYN partners annually, estimated budget \$6,000 per PLA	2017 - 2020
1.2	Subsidize ISSA membership and participation fees at ISSA conferences for partners to benefit from professional development and other opportunities offered by the association.	Subsidized ISSA memberships for six organizations per year, supported attendance of 12 individuals at ISSA conference – representatives of partners annually	2017 - 2020
1.3	Assist local partners in developing tailored, demand-driven professional development opportunities, including the provision of ISSA resources, translations, identification of partners, support in curriculum design.	Active involvement in 2 professional development events annually	2017 - 2020
1.4	Advocacy for systemic inclusion of professional development into ECD when services are provided in multi-cultural environment, including Romani and Traveller communities – case study of Slovakia	Pilot training (modules and training itself) for kindergarten staff in municipalities building new kindergartens	2017 - 2020

*Strategic Goal 2: Become a go-to knowledge and advocacy hub for practitioners and professionals across Europe working for and with Romani and Traveller children, families and communities.*

SPECIFIC TASK		QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS	TIMELINE
2.1	Develop an online platform – website with resources and easily accessible information about Roma and ECEC and populate it with information. <a href="http://www.reyn.info">www.reyn.info</a>	Website with library/resources section, profiles of national networks, initiatives and blog section	2017 - 2020
2.2	Partner with research institutes and universities in collecting information about education and care services benefitting Romani and Traveller children and their families	Roundtable expert meeting in Leiden, co-authored research reports	2017 - 2020



*Strategic Goal 3: Achieve stronger presence of quality ECD services in pro-inclusion policies targeting Roma and Travellers; effectively attract attention to Romani and Traveller children in general ECD policies*

SPECIFIC TASK		QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS	TIMELINE
3.1	Establishment and maintenance of a Roma ECD platform involving international partners focused on Roma and early childhood education and care	Two roundtable meetings per year taking place in Brussels	2017 - 2020
3.2	White paper on Roma ECD based on consultations with national REYNs and partners - compilation of available information in countries with national REYNs	White paper, meeting with partners and national REYNs	Second half of 2017
3.3	Advocacy campaign to promote effective implementation of ECD policies within the national Roma integration strategies	Annual review, list of recommendations, letters to governments, meetings with relevant ministries	2017 - 2020
3.4	Regular in-country monitoring (in countries with national REYNs) of how general pro-inclusion or ECD policies affect young Romani and Traveller children and their families	Annual review, list of recommendations, letters to governments, meetings with relevant ministries	2017 - 2020

*Strategic Goal 4: Include early childhood education and care services from birth to 6 in the European Commission's annual review of the national Roma integration strategies*

SPECIFIC TASK		QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS	TIMELINE
4.1	Shadow annual reviews of National Roma Integration Strategies in 13 selected countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kosovo, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine)	Two shadow reviews of NRIS – in design and implementation	2017, 2019
4.2	Advocacy campaign at European Commission (advocacy tools developed: videos, briefs, meetings, and advocacy event in Brussels) to promote more efficient monitoring of ECD policies in NRIS implementation	Annual list of recommendations with evidence on implementation at local level	2017 and 2018



*Strategic Goal 5: Support the development measures and policies to attract and retain more Roma and Travellers in the ECD workforce through an advocacy campaign and mobilizing national alliances and partnerships*

SPECIFIC TASK		QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS	TIMELINE
5.1	Desk research on mechanisms introduced by European countries in attracting and promoting diversity in ECD profession	Research paper with case studies, best practices, and recommendations for institutions and administrative bodies	Mid 2017
5.2	Research on existing Romani actors in various positions in the ECEC system, existing pathways for career accession and development, and on existing tools promoting diversity and on affirmative action opportunities in two countries	Two research papers on legislation and policy instruments to support Roma and Travellers in ECD workforce (one per selected state)	Late 2017
5.3	Providing consultancy for the government, local administration or other entities with policies aimed at attracting more Roma and Travellers to become ECD professionals.	Two meetings with local stakeholders per country (all countries with national networks)	Mid 2017 – Mid 2018
5.4	Mobilizing a local alliance for developing policy measures to attract and retain Roma and Travellers in ECD professions	At least two policy measures enacted by the local alliance in each of the two targeted countries	Late 2017 – Mid 2018
5.5	Online video campaign for attracting more Roma and Travellers into ECD workforce	Two advocacy videos (one per country, two versions – English and state language)	Beginning of 2018

*Strategic Goal 6: Promote roles of Roma and Travellers in assisting professions to become resource persons for bilingual education, inclusive learning, and social justice.*

SPECIFIC TASK		QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS	TIMELINE
6.1	Design of career development program to empower Roma actors to become educators; cultural brokers; trainers on bilingual education, inclusive learning, and social justice	Toolkit with specific guidelines	Mid 2018
6.2	Pilot in two countries: training and involvement of Roma actors in career development program	Romani ECD professionals and paraprofessionals going through the training	Late 2018 - 2019
6.3	Advocacy campaign for formal recognition of the program and role of cultural brokers in general	Video campaign, online campaign, list of country-specific recommendations to authorities, round-table meeting with stakeholders	2018 - 2019



