

Priority Actions for Decision Makers in Europe

A Call on Behalf of Young Romani and Traveller Children living on the margins

The Covid-19 Crisis and Vulnerable Romani and Traveller Families

In times of pandemic and global health crisis, it is important to remember the most vulnerable and often invisible – young children and their families living on the margins of society in extremely adverse conditions.

The Roma population is the largest minority in Europe estimated at [10-12 million persons](#), and [80% of them](#) are children and families at risk of poverty, who live without adequate housing, in crowded and unhealthy formal settlements or precarious informal slums, many of them without access to electricity, running and drinking water and sewerage. Their lives are affected by forced evictions, poor access to basic educational, health and social services, and growing discrimination, segregation and exclusion.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic added a new challenge to the already existing and long-lasting ones, exacerbating the severe situation many Roma communities live in.

REYN, the community of early childhood professionals and practitioners promoting the wellbeing and holistic development of Romani and Traveller children in their early years, feels the urgency to put in the spotlight those children and families who usually are neglected, but visible only when they are victims of discriminatory attacks or scapegoats to justify emergency and anti-human rights measures. Sadly, such instances have recently been featured on different media channels across Europe.

Knowing the long lasting impact that early years have on the health and wellbeing of every individual throughout their entire life, we are concerned about the short and long term impact of the COVID-19 crisis on young Romani and Traveller children living on the margins. We urge European and country leaders to ensure that conditions will be provided for every child to be protected and supported in all aspects.

Early Childhood Development science tells us that:

- The first years of life lay the foundation for success in adulthood, and those starting behind will remain behind.
- Vulnerable children, especially Romani, have the unique opportunity to overcome discrimination and social injustice when they are given the opportunity to develop to their full potential and flourish in a nurturing environment.
- The empowerment of Romani and Traveller parents is essential to build positive parenthood practices, secure attachment, and sustainable support to their children's development.
- ECD professionals play a key role in bridging the gaps that prevent the involvement and participation of Romani and Traveller children and their families in inclusive environments.
- Trusting relations between families and ECD professionals are the foundations for successful interventions targeting Romani and Traveller families.
- Universal, holistic, intersectoral, and integrated approaches must be adopted when addressing the multi-faceted problems Romani and Traveller children and families are facing.

Major challenges signaled by Romani and Traveller Early Years Networks active in 11 European countries:

- **The lack of food-supply Romani and Traveller families living on the margins are experiencing is extreme and a dire emergency.** The physical distance rules adopted by national governments put on hold the traditional work many Romani parents used to perform, asking them to stay home. Due to loss of income and food supply, healthy nutrition has been put at stake, with negative consequences, especially for the youngest children. On top of that, discontinuing school attendance has caused the loss of a full meal a day for many Romani and Traveller children.
- **The health of vulnerable Romani and Traveller children and parents is seriously at risk** due to the living

conditions, the lack of adequate information about protective and preventive measures, and the unaffordability of healthcare and medical supplies.

- While European governments demand citizens to stay home, the requirement is almost impossible to be met by **Romani and Traveller families who do not have a place they can call “home”**. Inadequate housing in general, and especially now, has a strong negative impact on the youngest ones, putting at risk their health, safety, and protection.
- **E-learning and schooling at home** programs have not considered the fact that most Romani and Traveller children have no access to electricity, internet connection, and IT devices. Even if provided, in many cases parents have no IT literacy to support their children in the e-learning process. Direct impact on their school attainment has been registered so far, and high dropout is envisaged wherever no measures will be adopted to fill the educational gap created by the isolation.
- **The home learning environment and responsive caregiving** have become even more crucial now when children are at home with their parents. Enormous hardship, the lack of care for parental wellbeing and support to Romani and Traveller parents, are affecting their capacities to care for their children in a responsive way.

We call upon the European Commission and other European Institutions to:

- Include in any mainstream recovery program measures that are explicitly addressing the challenges faced by **vulnerable** children and families, among whom Romani and Traveller ones, in order to ensure that rights, services, and goods reach any citizens in the EU.
- Make the adoption of the **post-2020 Roma inclusion strategy** a top priority in the agenda, without further delay or postponement.
- Bring the **EU Child Guarantee** mechanism into force to alleviate the increasing extreme poverty experienced by children in Europe, among whom Romani and Traveller ones.
- **Fight Antigypsyism** as a precondition of any intervention.

We call upon the European National Governments to act now:

- Provide Romani and Traveller children and families with access to **basic facilities** such as running and drinking water, to guarantee adequate hygienic-sanitary and health conditions within formal and informal settlements.
- Ensure the distribution of **medical devices** such as protective masks and gloves to Roma communities and adequate information (provided by health and cultural mediators) about the preventive measures.
- Prepare adequate, timely, and **non-discriminatory health intervention plans** that can prevent the spreading of COVID-19 within Roma settlements in cases of confirmed contamination with the virus.
- Support Romani and Traveller families with young children through the **distribution of necessary basic goods, food packages, and educational materials** that could guarantee adequate nutrition and early learning opportunities.
- Enhance **young Romani and Traveller children’s access and attendance of schooling at home** programs through the provision of electricity and internet connection, IT devices, alternative e-learning experiences, and educational assistance to ensure that they are not left behind.
- Plan actions for **bridging the educational gap** such as providing priority access to educational services to vulnerable Romani and Traveller children during the “phase 2”.
- Ensure that Romani and Traveller families living in extreme poverty and remote areas have **access to the official information** regarding the restrictive measures put in place.
- Guarantee that re-budgeting of resources does not affect the ones destined to vulnerable children and families.
- **Put a stop to the raising hate-speech** against Roma communities, which has been translated in the adoption of discriminatory measures in many European countries, putting at stake the safety and security of many Romani and Traveller children and families.

If we all join forces today to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable young Romani and Traveller children and their families, we will build a more inclusive and equitable society tomorrow!

Organizations who support the Call

Host organizations of National Romani Early Years Networks:

[VBJK](#) – host organization of [REYN Belgium](#)



[Kali Sara](#) – host organization of [REYN Bosnia & Herzegovina](#)



[Trust for Social Achievement](#) – host organization of [REYN Bulgaria](#)



[Open Academy Step by Step Croatia](#) – host organization of [REYN Croatia](#)



[Partners Hungary](#) – host organization of [REYN Hungary](#)



[Associazione 21 luglio Onlus](#) – host organization of [REYN Italy](#)



[Kosova Education Center](#) – host organization of [REYN Kosovo](#)



[Association of Pedagogic Assistants](#) – host organization of [REYN Serbia](#)



[Step by Step Centre for Quality in Education](#) – host organization of [REYN Slovenia](#)



[Wide Open School](#) – host organization of [REYN Slovakia](#)



Transcarpathian Regional Charitable Foundation "Blago" – host organization of [REYN Ukraine](#)



Partners:

[Eurochild](#)



[Roma Education Fund](#)



[European Public Health Alliance](#)

