

# Roma Week 2023

- Event hosted by MEP **Milan Brglez** (S&D, Slovenia)
- Co-organised by:
  - **EPHA, ISSA-REYN, Eurochild, Minority Initiative**



ROMANI  
EARLY YEARS  
NETWORK



ROMA HEALTH  
NETWORK



ephia european  
public health  
alliance

# UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF YOUNG ROMA CHILDREN IN EUROPE

DATE AND TIME:  
27 APRIL 2023  
14:00- 16:00

VENUE:  
ROOM A3H1 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT  
RUE WERTZ 60, 1047 BRUSSELS

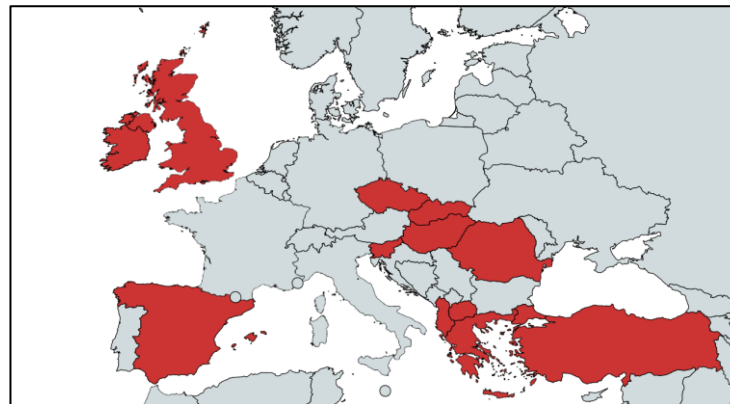
ROMAWeek

- European Public Health Alliance

- **Brussels-based NGO Alliance**
- **70+ members across Europe**
- “To improve health and strengthen the voice of public health in Europe”

- Roma Health Network

- Roma and pro-Roma Non-governmental organisations and researchers



# Keynote Speech



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**Dr. Milan Brglez**

MEP from Slovenia, Progressive Alliance  
of Socialists and Democrats (S&D)



Group of the Progressive Alliance of  
**Socialists & Democrats**  
in the European Parliament



ROMANI  
EARLY YEARS  
NETWORK

# UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF YOUNG ROMA CHILDREN IN EUROPE



# Romani Early Years Network

Europe-wide initiative of ISSA, the International Step by Step Association;



10 Years of keeping Roma children in the spotlight

Established in partnership with OSF Early Childhood Program

REYN **strives** to raise awareness about the importance of early years, aiming to:

- **Strengthen the competencies** of early childhood professionals who work with Roma and Traveller children by promoting professionalism in the early years
- **Ensure access to quality** early childhood services
- **Increase and value diversity** in the curriculum, practice, and in the workforce

# UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF EVERY YOUNG CHILD STARTS WITH RESPECTING AND REALIZING THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

## RIGHTS 4 ALL

## ALSO 4 ROMA





# 90%

of a child's brain  
development  
happens  
before the age of 5

Source: Harvard Center on Developing Child



# 10 Facts why early years are crucial!

**1. Brain development:** ECD science shows that 90% of brain development occurs in the first five years of life, making this a critical period for cognitive, social, and emotional growth.

**2. Neural connections:** During early childhood, the brain forms over one million new neural connections per second, establishing the foundation for lifelong learning and behavior.

**3. Early intervention:** Identifying and addressing developmental concerns in the early years can prevent long-term challenges and support better outcomes for children.

**4. Secure attachment:** Developing secure attachment with caregivers during early childhood fosters trust, self-regulation, and healthy social-emotional development.

**5. Language acquisition:** The early years are essential for language acquisition, with children learning vocabulary and language skills best in a rich, responsive environment.

**6. Resilience:** A strong early childhood foundation enables children to build resilience and adapt to adversity throughout their lives.

**7. Life-long impact:** Positive early experiences have long-lasting effects on mental and physical health, academic achievement, and future economic success.

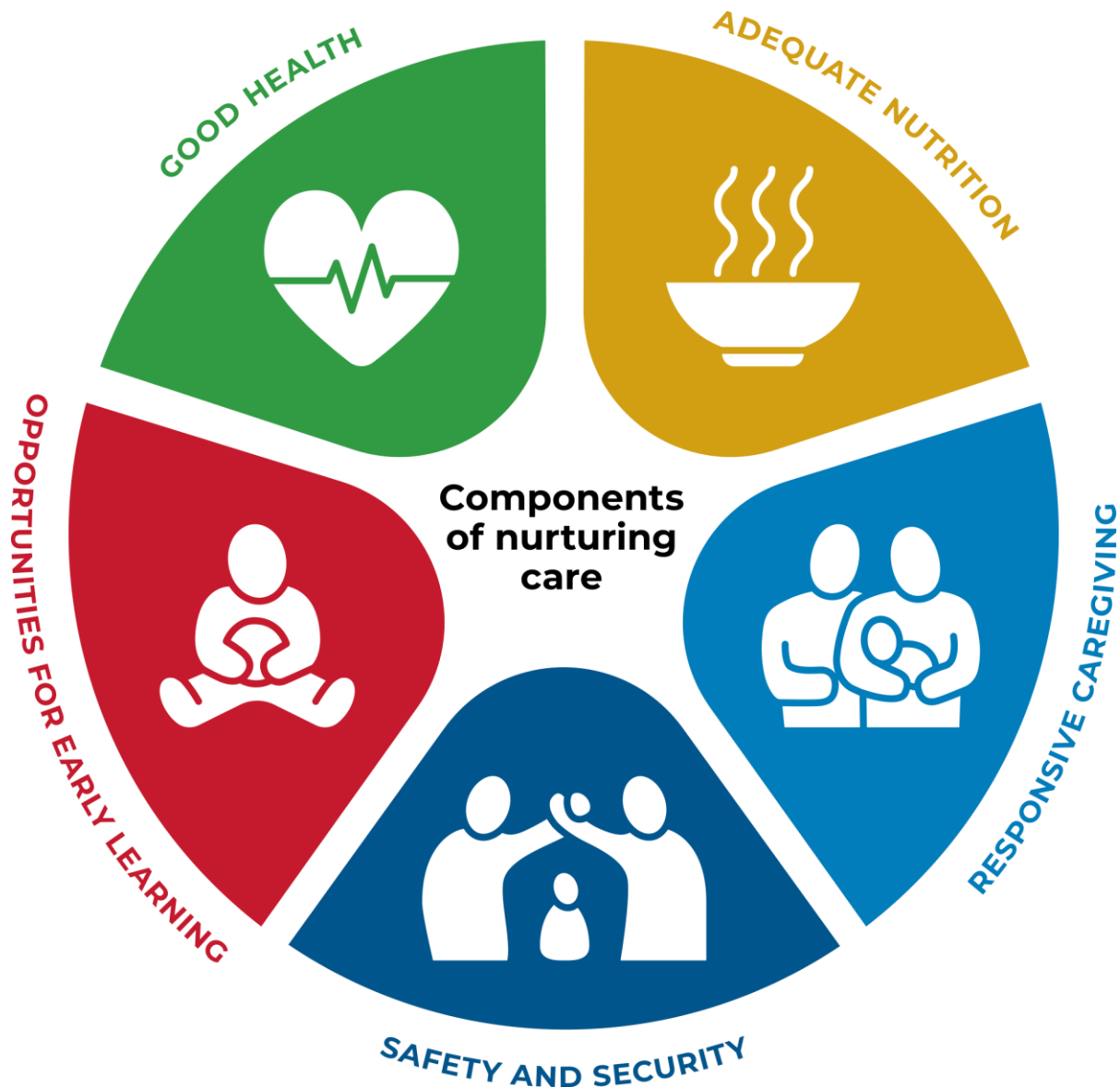
**8. Cost-effectiveness:** Investing in early childhood development yields high returns, reducing the need for remediation or intervention later in life.

**9. Skill development:** Early years lay the groundwork for developing essential skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration.

**10. Social equity:** Prioritizing early childhood development helps to reduce inequalities and promote social mobility by providing all children with a strong start in life.





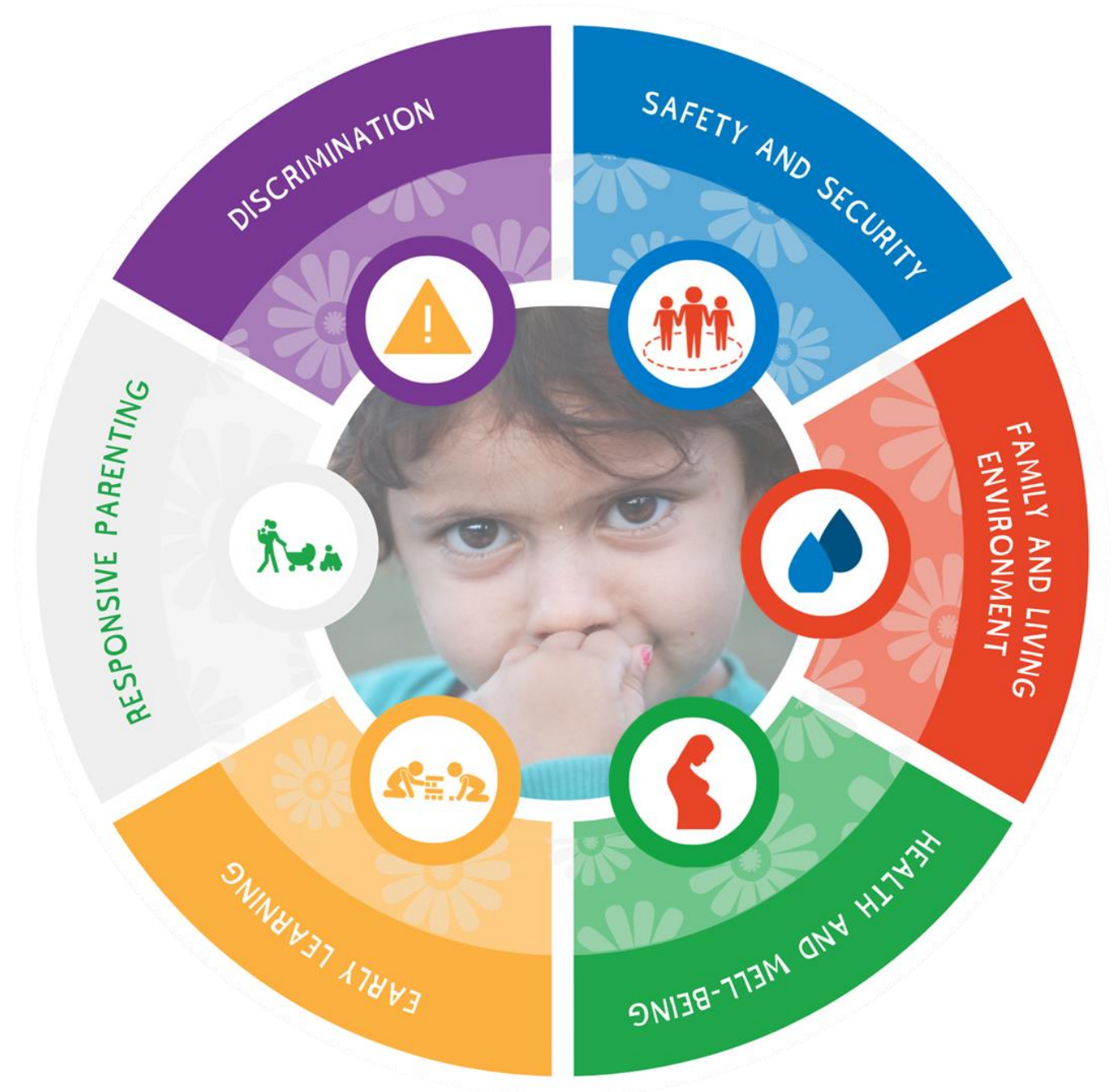


All children have the right to be raised in a family and to have access to quality health care, good nutrition, education, play and protection from harm, abuse and discrimination.

Children have the right to grow up in an environment in which they are enabled to reach their full potential in life.

#EUROMACHILDREN

# REYN Early Childhood Research



**CREA**  
COMMUNITY OF  
RESEARCH ON  
EXCELLENCE  
FOR ALL



UNIVERSITAT DE  
BARCELONA

in partnership with the Roma Studies Groups (CEG)  
at [CREA](#) – the University of Barcelona and financial  
support of Open Society Foundations

#EUROMACHILDREN

## Exploring key areas impacting young child's development:



11 Countries

460 Roma families

312 ECD Professionals

56 Practitioners

47 Policy-makers

54+ focus groups

1 What we already know

2 What Europe and EU countries need to do

3 What we need to know and do

# BREAKING THE SILENCE

**The right of each young Roma child in  
Europe to develop and thrive**

European REYN Early Childhood Study

Exploring the Status of Young Roma Children and their Families



#EUROMACHILDREN

# Breaking the silence

THE RIGHT OF EACH YOUNG ROMA CHILDREN IN EUROPE TO DEVELOP AND THRIVE

EUROPEAN REYN EARLY CHILDHOOD STUDY  
Exploring the Status of Young Roma Children and their Families

ROMANI EARLY YEARS NETWORK

EUROPEAN COMMISSION



## KEY FINDINGS AND CHALLENGES

### REYN Early Childhood Research at a glance

#### FAMILY STATUS—LIVING CONDITIONS

Roma families face significant challenges regarding their socio-economic status and living conditions, such as low educational levels, high unemployment rates, poor living conditions, and barriers to accessing financial support.

**6 out of 10** Roma children live in areas exposed to harmful effects of air pollution.

#### HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

The health and well-being of young Roma children and families are affected by such issues as inadequate immunization, poor maternal health awareness, barriers to accessing family and emotional support, and poor dietary habits and routines.

**1 in 5** young Roma children do not get all the required vaccines for their age.

#### SAFETY AND SECURITY

Safety and security concerns arise from barriers to social security or social protection, as well as growing up in neighborhoods exposed to crime, violence, and vandalism.

**7 out of 10** Roma children grow up in unsafe neighborhoods.

#### EARLY LEARNING

Early learning opportunities for Roma children are hindered by barriers to quality early childhood education services and other learning environment spaces or facilities. Besides the lack or scarce availability and proximity of services, language barriers stand out as the most common challenge affecting children's access and full participation.

**6 out of 10** Roma children do not have access to quality early childhood services because they are unreachable or unavailable.

#### RESPONSIVE PARENTING

Challenges related to responsive parenting include Roma mothers being the primary caregivers without sufficient support from other family members and a lack of awareness among caregivers about the power of play for a child's development.

**3 out of 10** Roma caregivers report not reading enough to their children.

#### DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination and antigypsyism are prevalent issues affecting young Roma children and their families. While antigypsyism remains deeply rooted in social and cultural attitudes and institutional practices, ongoing discrimination is experienced in various aspects of life, including access to public services, housing, employment, and education.

**60%** of young children face discrimination when accessing early childhood and public services, according to interviews with early childhood professionals.\*



\*The study shows that in many cases, parents were not able to (couldn't) identify discriminatory practices as such.

# EARLY LEARNING

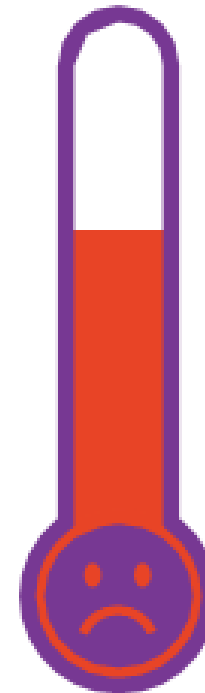
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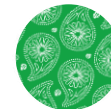
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# Moving Towards Fundamental Realization of the Rights of Young Roma Children: A Call for Coordinated European and National Action

1. **Fostering cross-sectoral policy coordination at EU level**
2. **Leveraging the Child Guarantee policy instrument**
3. **Prioritize the most vulnerable children in achieving the Barcelona targets**
4. **Prioritizing child- and family-centered National Roma Inclusion Strategies**
5. **Combating Antigypsyism**
6. **Making sound data-based decisions for real transformation**





# SUCCESSFUL ECD ACTIONS:



- INTERNSHIP FOR ROMA STUDENTS
- DREAM TO GROW CAMPAIGN
- LANGUAGE FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENTS PROMOTING ROMA LANGUAGE
- NON-FORMAL SERVICES FOR YOUNG ROMA CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES
- FIRST YEARS, FIRST PRIORITIES
- TOY FOR INCLUSION

*first years  
first priority*



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**ROMAWeek**



**Eurochild**

Putting children at  
the heart of Europe

**For a society where children grow up  
happy, healthy and confident and  
respected as individuals in their own  
rights**

**EU Roma Week 24-27 April 2023**

# Who are we?



We are striving for a society where all children and young people grow up happy, healthy, confident and respected as individuals in their own right.

We influence policies, build civil society capacity, facilitate mutual learning and exchange practice and research.



# Eurochild Membership



## 37 countries

EU27

Albania

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Kosovo

North Macedonia

Norway

Serbia

Switzerland

Turkey

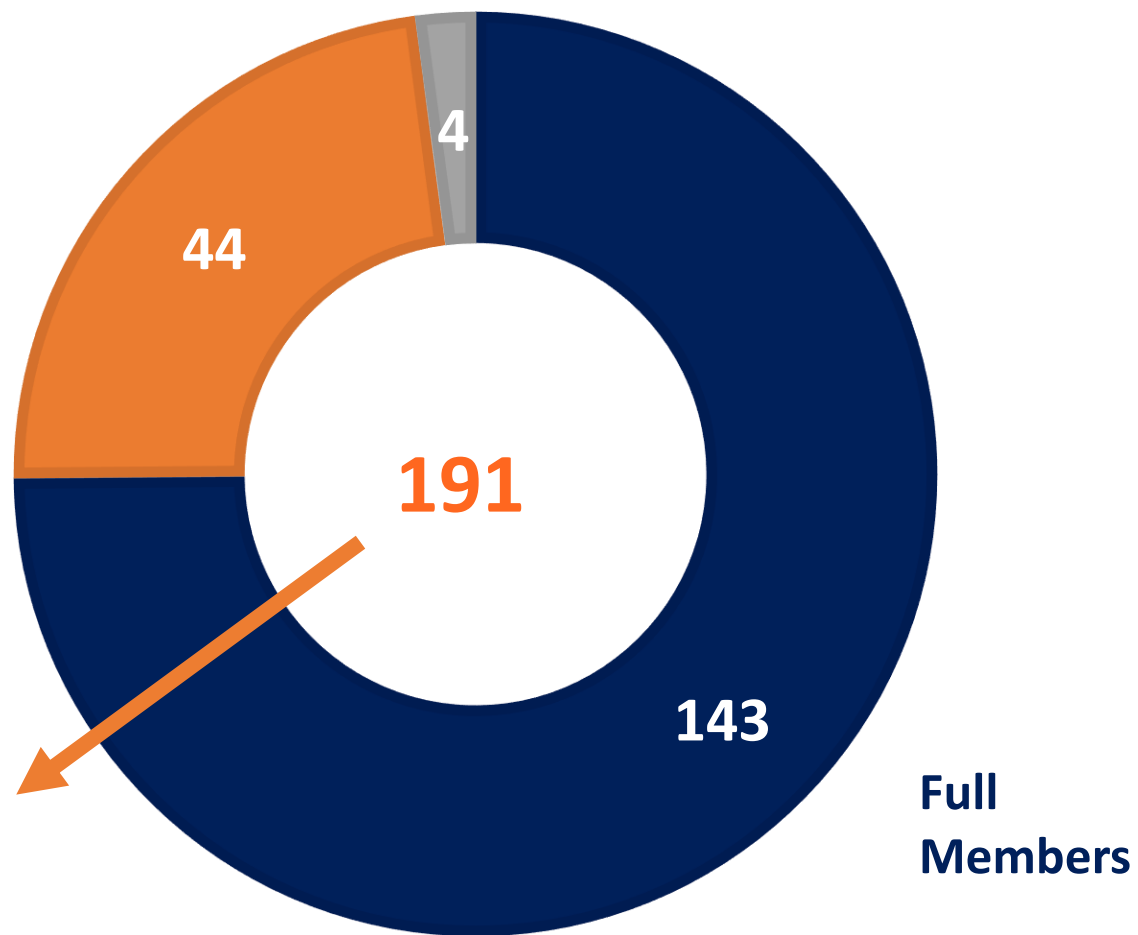
Ukraine

United Kingdom

- 23 National Partner Networks
- 23 International organisations
- 88 National Organisations
- 12 Academic and research institutions
- 5 Child- and Youth-led organisations
- 11 Public or statutory bodies
- 25 Individuals + 4 Honorary Members

## Associate Members

## Honorary Members



# Strategic Framework - 2022-25



**GOAL 1.**  
Make children's rights  
a public policy  
priority in Europe



**GOAL 2.**  
Strengthen the  
community of  
children's rights  
activists across Europe



**GOAL 3.**  
Elevate the voices of  
children and young  
people, in particular  
those experiencing  
disadvantage



**GOAL 4.**  
Consolidate the  
network for improved  
sustainability and  
impact

# Eurochild for Roma

## The Reaching-In project

Reaching-in project is a European collaboration between children and adults, aiming at increasing the impact that marginalised children have on public decision-making at local, national level and European levels. Our goal is to connect at grassroots level with marginalised children, including Roma children, children living in alternative care and migrant children, and organisations advocating with them.

## National Eurochild Forums (NEFs)



Eurochild



# (In)visible children report

- To provide timely and relevant information collected from our members working at national level, to **make children in Europe visible**.
- To live up to the **partnership principle** – to broaden policy making by stakeholders' participation.
- 2022 Report - assessments provided by **35 Eurochild members** in **22 countries**



# Eurochild for Roma

## Leveraging EU influence to deliver change for families in adversity in Bulgaria

The project aims to strengthen the prevention of family separation by supporting a “360 degrees” tailored advocacy agenda for Bulgaria using all strings and influences of the EU for redirecting of resources and changing national policies.

### How:

- Gather evidence on what works
- Support the implementation of the Child Guarantee
- Engage with policy makers and strengthen capacities to allocate or redirect funds and implement EU policy



# Thank you for your attention!

**Reneta Krivonozova**  
**Policy and Advocacy Officer – Child Poverty**

## Let's stay in touch!

**Email:** [reneta.krivonozova@eurochild.org](mailto:reneta.krivonozova@eurochild.org)

**Learn more about our work:** [www.eurochild.org](http://www.eurochild.org)



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# Roma Children in Care

Tanja Vasic, MA Psychology,  
Minority Initiative, Austria



# Topic and the Team

- **The topic** Roma children in care, apart from being covered by very few Roma organisations and social work professionals, is mostly neglected. Somehow it seems that the paradigm of social justice, human rights and especially child rights through the prism of Roma ethnicity is extremely difficult. To be described, defined and after all resolved.
- **The Team:** The Minority Initiative created a Roma Children Steering Committee, an informal group of Roma experts in the field of social work. In addition, the Minority Initiative is one of the member in the coalition with EPHA, Eurochild and REYN.

## International Documents Referring to Roma Children in Care

- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC ) (Sept 1990)
- European Pillar of Social Rights (2017) and Action Plan (January 2021)
- EU Roma Strategic Framework ( October 2020)
- EU Strategy on the rights of Child (March 2021)
- EU Child Guarantee (June 2021)
- National Action Plans (18 countries already submitted) referring to Child Guarantee

*Key points according to the ERRC (European Roma Rights Centre) Report (2021)*

*The ERRC maintains that the institutionalization of young children is a form of violence, and the disproportionate overrepresentation of Romani kids in state care amounts to a form of racist violence. A human rights-compliant response to the existing situation of Romani children and children with disabilities in state care, calls for the immediate and total elimination of institutional care and the development of appropriate child support services across Europe. It should also be stressed that the removal of children from families purely on the basis of poverty is illegal. When this is coupled with racial biases against Romani families, it also becomes discrimination.*

# REASONS FOR OVERREPRESENTATION

## According to an ERRC Report

- **Two main categories of reasons for the overrepresentation of Roma children in institutional care:**

### 1. Those related to the family situation, such as:

- Poverty
- Material conditions (such as unemployment, indebtedness, and inadequate housing)
- School absenteeism
- Single parenthood and unwanted pregnancies
- Migration.

### 2. Those related to the child protection system itself

- Discrimination.
- *Note: Child abuse was considered a very small factor in placement of Roma children in state care.*

Multifactor or poverty „+“ factor

Poverty: reason or excuse

### It's about attitudes

Roma families **MUST** meet requirements

**Workload, a reason for not doing proper social work. Is it?**

Ethnic date: **racism** or **excuse** for racism?

In **2014**, the **Commission issued detailed guidelines** on how to **operationalise the 'policy theory'** so that structural funds could support a wide range of measures to accompany reforms in the Member States. 16 Billion Euros were subsequently made available for the 2014-2020 period to support the transition from institutional care to community-based living as *“a mandatory change process to ensure citizens' rights are respected.”*

**Deinstitutionalisation is more difficult than at may seem**

**Resistance to deinstitutionalisation**

## FACTS:

- *Roma children disproportionately in care and little progress made in last 20 years*
- *Most Roma children in care are in institutions - damaging effects of institutional care have been known for many years. Most countries in Europe have moved away from this but Roma children still remain in residential care.*
- *They are in care because of lack of supportive services to Roma families to help prevent the need for removal of children to care. When care is necessary, there is a lack of community based alternatives to institutional care e.g fostering, adoption which are more available to non-Roma children.*

## ***Child Guarantee/National Action Plans***

There are already 18 National plan of Actions in 11 of them Roma children are named as one of the vulnerable groups.

In 10 National Plans **alternative care** is AN ISSUE.

## ***WHAT WE CAN OFFER:***

- ***Professional Culturally Sensitive*** support and assistance in:
  - Assessment and research
  - Programme and/or services development
    - Further education and training
    - Social work management
  - NGO empowerment in specified areas
    - Monitoring and evaluation

## *Examples of programmes we can develop and deliver:*

- *Gate-keeping*
- *Community work*
- *Life Story Work*
- *Leaving Care*
- *Roma Foster Care*

### **WHY IS THE TIME TO ACT NOW?**

More than ever we have positive preconditions: Policy and strategic documents - Child Guarantee, National Action Plans, financial support, existing bodies (Social Protection Committee, Child Guarantee Coordinator), Coalition, ready for the change.

Roma children should not be neither last nor the least to fight for their best interests.

We are ready, and we do believe there are lot of potential partners among all of you.

Thank you for being with us!

**THANK YOU FOR BEING WITH US!**

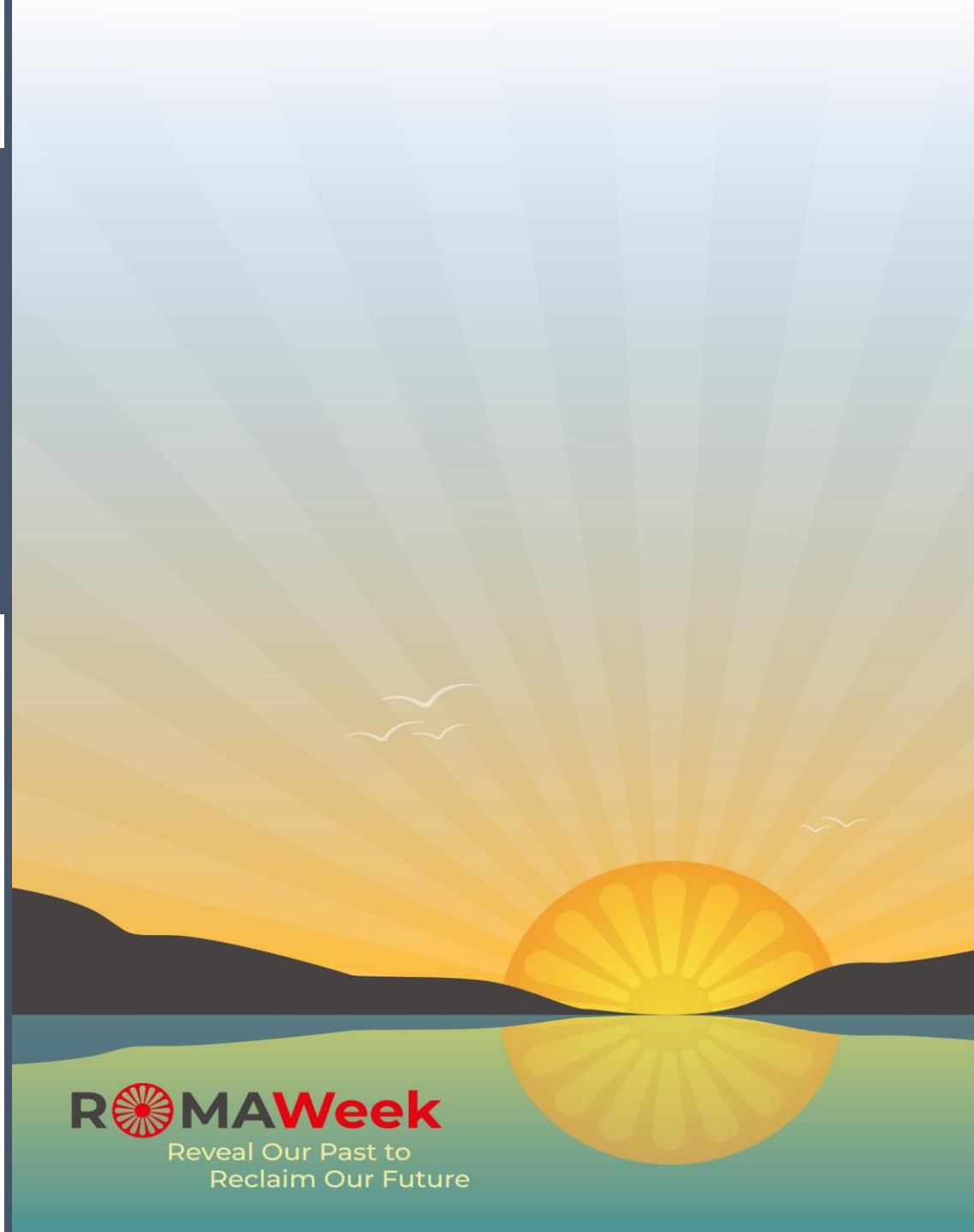


# Comfort Break

Back at **15:10**



**ROMAWeek**  
Reveal Our Past to  
Reclaim Our Future





# Call to Action

- Continued cooperation on Roma Early Childhood Development
- **Recap**
  - **Evidence** of the situation of Roma children (ISSA-REYN)
  - The effects of **antigypsyism** and **poverty** (Eurochild and Minority Initiative)
  - The importance of **early years** for health and wellbeing throughout life
- What can **Civil Society** do?
- Role of Institutions

**ROMAWeek**

Reveal Our Past to  
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# Momentum



- Funding alone is not enough to tackle deep-rooted antigypsyism  
*7 years is already too late*
- Proceedings on Children in 'special education'
  - Spanish Presidency



***Where do we want to go?***

# Momentum



EU Alliance for Investing in Children

First Years First Priority



Renewed cooperation between EPHA, ISSA-REYN, Eurochild, Minority Initiative

- Focus on Roma children as a marginalized group (still a large gap)
- Continued **EU level advocacy**
- **Assessment and research** on ECD topics
- **Monitoring and evaluation** of existing policy frameworks and national action plans

Social work to unlock the potential of Roma children in **institutional care** or 'special education'

# An Impulse for Roma Children

- Cooperation on Roma Early Childhood Development



- Support from civil society → Filling in the gaps



- Question and Answer Session



- Post-Event Statement



- An impulse for Roma children

# Commission Input

**Géraldine Libreau**  
Policy Officer for Early Childhood  
Education and Care, **DG Education,  
Youth, Sport and Culture**



**first years**  
*first priority*

**A FAIR START  
FOR *every* CHILD  
IN EUROPE**



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**#FirstYearsFirstPriority**  
**FirstYearsFirstPriority.eu**



**Eurochild**  
Putting children at  
the heart of Europe



**epr** *ia* **eu** **ropean**  
**public health**  
**alliance**



**ROMA**  
**EDUCATION FUND**  
Invest | Educate | Engage

# The FYFP Campaign's mission

To influence public policies and spending so that all families – but particularly those living with adversity – get the support they need to provide a healthy, safe and nurturing environment for their youngest children.

## Specific focus on:

- children under 3 years of age;
- vulnerable groups: children with disabilities, Roma children, refugee and migrant children, children in alternative care, children living in extreme poverty.

**#FirstYearsFirstPriority**  
**FirstYearsFirstPriority.eu**

**first years**  
*first priority*



# Multiplying impact at national level and supporting national partners to become strong advocates using the EU influence

- **Bulgaria** - Trust for Social Achievement, For Our Children Foundation
- **Finland** - Central Union for Child Welfare
- **France** - Ensemble pour l'Éducation de la Petite Enfance
- **Hungary** - Family, Child, Youth Association
- **Ireland** - Child Rights Alliance
- **Portugal** - Fundação Nossa Senhora do Bom Sucesso
- **Romania** - Step by Step Center for Education and Professional Development
- **Serbia** - Pomoc Deci
- **Spain** - Plataforma de Infancia
- **Slovakia** - Open Society Foundation

# Learn, engage, share



• Visit the website:  
[FirstYearsFirstPriority.eu](https://FirstYearsFirstPriority.eu)

• Vision flyer

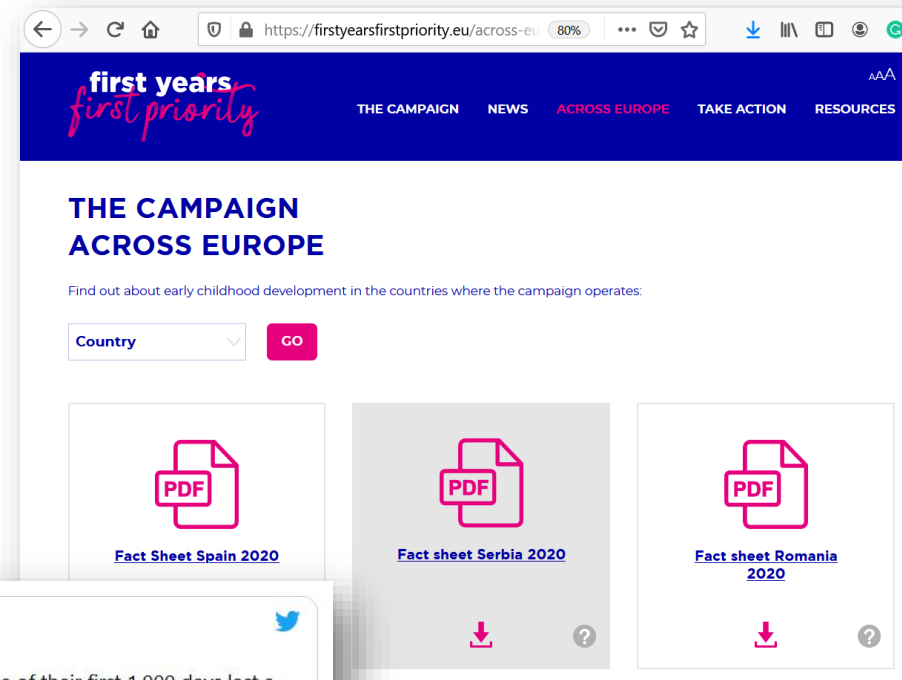
• Framing document

• Country fact sheets

• Country profiles

• Case studies

• Take action



**#FirstYearsFirstPriority**  
**FirstYearsFirstPriority.eu**

**first years**  
*first priority*

# Thematic Papers



## Putting early childhood at the heart of the European Child Guarantee

### INTRODUCTION

In June 2021, EU Member States unanimously adopted a Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee. This aims to prevent and combat child poverty and social exclusion by guaranteeing access to some key services to all children in need – high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC), education and school-based activities, healthy nutrition, adequate housing and healthcare.

November  
2022



## Prioritising the professionalisation of early childhood education and care staff

### INTRODUCTION

All children have the right to a fair start in life. Early childhood education and care (ECEC) services for children under six years of age play a fundamental role in laying strong



## Ensure universal access to maternal healthcare in the European Union

The first 1000 days of a child's life are crucial for its development, they provide the foundations which may determine lifelong health. This begins before the child is born and depends for a large part on the health of the mother. A child's earliest experiences shape their brain development and have a lifelong impact on their mental and emotional health, as well as their physical, cognitive and social development. As part of a series by the First Years, First Priority (FYFP) campaign, this paper focuses on **maternal and perinatal healthcare** – the period from pregnancy to the first year after birth. A mother's

- Upcoming papers in 2023 focusing on:
- Roma young children and their families
  - Migrant and refugee young children and their families
  - Young children with special needs or disabilities and their families

**#FirstYearsFirstPriority**  
**FirstYearsFirstPriority.eu**

**first years**  
*first priority*

# Question and Answer Session

## Next steps for Roma ECD?



ROMANI  
EARLY YEARS  
NETWORK



ROMA HEALTH  
NETWORK



Eurochild  
making children  
the heart of Europe



INTERNATIONAL  
STEP by STEP  
ASSOCIATION



ephia european  
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# Concluding Words

Next steps for Roma  
ECD?



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# Unlocking the Potential of Young Roma Children

Thank you for attending  
and for your attention!



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Reclaim Our Future