

Bulgarian "For Tomorrow" Foundation trained 15 youth workers from 9 European countries in promoting the social inclusion of young people with special educational needs

From March 20th to 31st , 2026, the "For Tomorrow" Foundation held its first project of the year - "Mindful Sound" - in the village of Dolni Rakovets, Bulgaria. Fifteen youth workers from nine countries - Turkey, North Macedonia, Lithuania, Spain, Croatia, Norway, Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria (including two young people with intellectual disabilities) - were trained in diverse and innovative techniques aimed at the social and professional inclusion of young people with special educational needs.

The participating NGOs were: Bungai Asociacion, Spain; Creatorium, Norway; Back to Nature, Turkey; Prirodna Perspektiva, Macedonia; Eutopia, Croatia; Tavoeuropa, Lithuania; Łódzki Dom Kultury, Poland; True Health, Romania and For Tomorrow Foundation, Bulgaria was the host organization.

The training course was attended by professionals with extensive experience working with young people with special educational needs, and the lead trainer was Mihaela Stoykova—Bulgaria's first certified sound therapist. She guided the volunteers through the secrets of using various vibrations, musical instruments, sounds, and movements to achieve relaxation, emotional regulation, and sensory balance. The youth workers worked and lived alongside their peers with special intellectual needs and had the opportunity to put what they had learned into practice. The volunteers applied their new knowledge during their visits to the Center for Social Rehabilitation and Integration for Children and Youth with Disabilities in Sofia, part of the Caritas Bulgaria network, and the "St. John of Rila" Center for Social Services in Blagoevgrad.

On March 30, at the City Art Gallery in Blagoevgrad, the project participants held an open demonstration of Sound therapy. The hands-on workshop showcased interactive methods and allowed young people with autism and various special needs to interact with musical instruments and experience the beneficial effects of sound, music, and movement. The sound techniques they learned were warmly welcomed by the youth with special needs and their parents, who shared that sound therapy truly provides emotional and psychological support for more active social inclusion and self-expression among children and youth with intellectual challenges.

Here is what else was included in the training program of the "Mindful Sound" project:

- March 22 – Topic: "Connection with Nature – Sound and Autism. An Introduction to Sound as a Universal Human Language and Its Impact on the Nervous System." By the lake in the village, participants engaged in voice-opening exercises, visited the church in the village of Dolni Rakovets, and explored the acoustic resonance

within it. Participants were introduced to the basic principles of rhythm, vibration, and the predictability of sound when working with people with autism.

- March 23 – Sound practice in nature – in the forest near the village, the volunteers dedicated the day to an experience with their eyes closed, focusing on mindfulness and connection with nature; This was followed by a sound journey with singing bowls, a gong, and other instruments, engaging all the senses, and in the evening there was a cultural evening featuring Turkey and Romania.

- March 24 – During the visit to the Caritas Center in Sofia, workshops were held on clay modeling, dough kneading and baking sweets, and painting cardboard Easter eggs; at the “Orfea” Center, the young people participated in a group activity on telling a musical story, and the afternoon concluded with a sensory tour of Sofia led by professionals from the Sensory Theater, Sofia.

- March 25 – The young people learned how to control their voices and sing together, explored the subtle tones of the chakras, and in the evening enjoyed traditional food, music, and dance from Croatia and Spain during a cultural evening featuring of both countries.

- March 26 – The day began with a grounding practice by the lake and listening to singing bowls filled with thermal water from the lake. Mihaela Stoykova demonstrated an interesting device that can capture and play back the impulses and energy of plants in the form of music. The day concluded with a cultural evening dedicated to Lithuania.

- March 27 – A training session was held to present and discuss methods for social inclusion and unlocking the potential of youth with special educational needs; A variety of techniques were demonstrated that can be applied in sound interventions and work with youth with special educational needs. The day was dedicated to Poland, Norway, and Macedonia, which presented their history, national cuisine, music, and traditions.

- March 28 – During the day participants created and presented their own sessions including methods learned and practiced during the training. Bulgaria’s cultural evening was held at the village hall in Dolni Rakovets. The villagers actively participated in the celebration by bringing homemade local specialties, and the group “Kemindzhi” – featuring Mihaela Stoykova on vocals and Stefka Raicheva on percussion – performed Bulgarian folk songs and invited the young people to join in a traditional dance.

- March 29 – Final discussions, sharing and reviewing what was learned, and clarifying of dissemination activities. An evening with representatives of the Sensory Theater – an improvised performance using neon lights

- March 30 – a visit to the “St. John of Rila” Center for Social and Professional Rehabilitation, Blagoevgrad, and an off-site presentation at the City Art Gallery in

Blagoevgrad of a sound story—a demonstration of sound therapy that helps reduce anxiety, improve concentration, and enhance communication skills. Young people with special educational needs who experience sensory overload or difficulties expressing emotions experienced firsthand the calming effect of sound therapy, which, through a gentle and nonverbal approach, maintains emotional balance and creates a sense of safety.

As part of the “Mindful Sound” project, the youth workers learned how to use the new tools in their work with people with special needs, how to promote their development through creative and sensory activities, how to support their independence, and how to help them express themselves more freely, build confidence, strengthen their motivation, and reach their full potential. The project improved the skills and capacity of youth workers for working with youth with intellectual disabilities and helped for the creation of sustainable partnerships between the participating organizations. The participants were very active and engaged in the topic and they shared immense positive impact like learning new methods for their work, expanding their knowledge about work with people with special needs, personal self-growth, grounding, self-reflection, connection with nature and each other, networking and creation of strong relationships with the group, and many more that can be seen in their personal feedbacks on the group of the project “MINDFUL SOUND - Erasmus+ Training Course/ 20-31.03.2026”. Each of the participants will also create a dissemination activity in their local community where they will show the learned methods in order to continue the impact of the project. The hosting and sending organizations will continue to partner in future projects regarding the topic of Mindful Sound with the goal to create an integrated model for the use of sound tools for social inclusion.