

# **EUROPEAN ROMA GRASSROOTS ORGANISATIONS (ERGO) NETWORK**

Case Studies 2021

## **“Roma access to adequate minimum income and social protection in Czech republic”**

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Description of the organization

Vzájemné soužití (Life Together) was founded in 1997 after catastrophic floods that had a disproportionate impact on the Roma of Ostrava. From that time onwards, Life Together has been trying to build up the Roma Community, organize, and support it so that the Roma can come to enjoy the same rights and opportunities as any other person in Czech Society. We have created educational and social services that are accessible to the Roma and other needy people. We have established bases within communities and have created Roma-Czech teams there to make our work meaningful and helpful, appropriate and easily accessible. We have thus been fortunate to take up hundreds of individual cases, group cases and community issues, and make them mainstream. In 1999, we established Ostrava's first free Legal and Social Advice Office. We have a full time lawyer and several teams of social workers to serve the people and influence institutions. Dignity of all and respect for each other is a cornerstone of our work. Life Together has expertise in many fields: Housing, Education, Health, Human rights, Employment. We have been involved in many field researches and studies.

For example:

- 2007 UPR submission on Housing of the Roma  
[https://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session1/CZ/COHRE\\_CZE\\_UPR\\_S1\\_2008\\_CentreonHousingRightsandEvictions\\_uprsubmission.pdf](https://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session1/CZ/COHRE_CZE_UPR_S1_2008_CentreonHousingRightsandEvictions_uprsubmission.pdf)
- 2009 SASTIPEN survey. Health and the Roma Community, analysis of the situation in Europe Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain. The analysis of the health situation was prepared by Life Together (Vzájemné soužití) on behalf of the Czech Government Office.  
[http://www.gitanos.org/upload/78/83/Health\\_and\\_the\\_Roma\\_Community.pdf](http://www.gitanos.org/upload/78/83/Health_and_the_Roma_Community.pdf)  
<https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/zalezitosti-romske-komunity/dokumenty/Sastipen.pdf>
- 2012 We worked with prof. Kevin Browne, Nottingham university on: The Problem of Child Abandonment and its Prevention.  
<https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/attachments/Child%20Abandonment%20and%20Its%20Prevention%20in%20Europe.pdf>
- 2014 We prepared the Shadow Report on Segregation of the Roma in Czech Education  
<http://www.dare-net.eu/cms/upload/file/shadow-report-on-roma-segregation-in-education-czechrepublic-english-2014.pdf>
- 2015 We prepared the Methodology for monitoring Roma national strategies for education.  
<http://www.dare-net.eu/cms/upload/file/national-methodology-for-monitoring-the-plans-on-education-within-the-national-strategies-for-roma-czechrepublic-english.pdf>
- 2015 Strategies and Tactics to Combat Segregation of Roma Children in Schools - Case studies from Romania, Croatia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Greece  
<https://ec.europa.eu/research-roma-children/?publications/366/>  
<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/groups/cffp/documents/childabandonment/czech/brochure.pdf>

We have also successfully organized demonstrations against harmful laws that sought to put unconstitutional bars on accessing housing benefits. [https://www.idnes.cz/ostrava/zpravy/petice-zaschvaleni-doplatku-na-bydleni.A150615\\_161515\\_ostrava-zpravy\\_jog](https://www.idnes.cz/ostrava/zpravy/petice-zaschvaleni-doplatku-na-bydleni.A150615_161515_ostrava-zpravy_jog)

## 1.2 Reasons, our motivation

Minimum wage protection is a corner stone of post-war Europe. From 1997, we at this organization, have observed direct and indirect attempts at excluding the Roma of their rights and entitlements- from schooling, housing, employment, and access to restaurants, public services, social services, state benefits.

The attempts used to be crude and open in the 90s. It is getting unfortunately very subtle, fuzzy and indirect nowadays. As members of the civil society, we watch over these developments closely and often are the first to know about them directly from the affected persons. We are aware of the laws, the entitlements. We are aware of the barriers put up to the Roma so that they cannot access entitlements that are legally theirs. We also try to follow discriminatory laws in the making. For these reasons we find this topic interesting. It is consistent with our work. We see an opportunity to step back, reflect and share. We also would like to obtain new insights from ERGO. We can share the final report with other local organizations and national networks. In addition we may also devote our attention to the other basic documents- The EU Active Inclusion Recommendation and the European Pillar of Social Rights. We have little in depth knowledge of these fundamental documents. But, on a more fundamental way, we should not take for granted the barriers that Roma face in accessing adequate minimum income and social protection. We drew on the knowledge and long experience of field social workers from the Child Protection Hnízdo Team of Life Together. We also used governmental data. We finally confronted our report with local Labour office officials, before submitting it.

### 1.3 Target group

In the Czech Republic (hereinafter referred to as the "CR") lived as of 2019 approximately 10.65 million inhabitants of the republic, of which almost 262,000 are Roma, and more than half of whom are so-called integrated Roma. The remaining part (approximately 119,000 people) are Roma, who can be considered socially excluded or at risk of social exclusion. Of these, approximately 73,800 people are also at risk of income poverty, material deprivation and at the same time live in households with low work intensity. Social exclusion is defined in the Czech Republic as the process of separating individuals or groups from society. Due to the unfavorable social situation, people do not have the opportunity to participate in everyday life and are isolated on the margins. These are mostly people with insufficient education, the long-term unemployed, suffering from various types of addiction, members of ethnic minorities, a life situation that they cannot manage on their own. Poverty and social exclusion of Roma are significantly affected by discrimination (Social Inclusion Strategy 2021-2030).

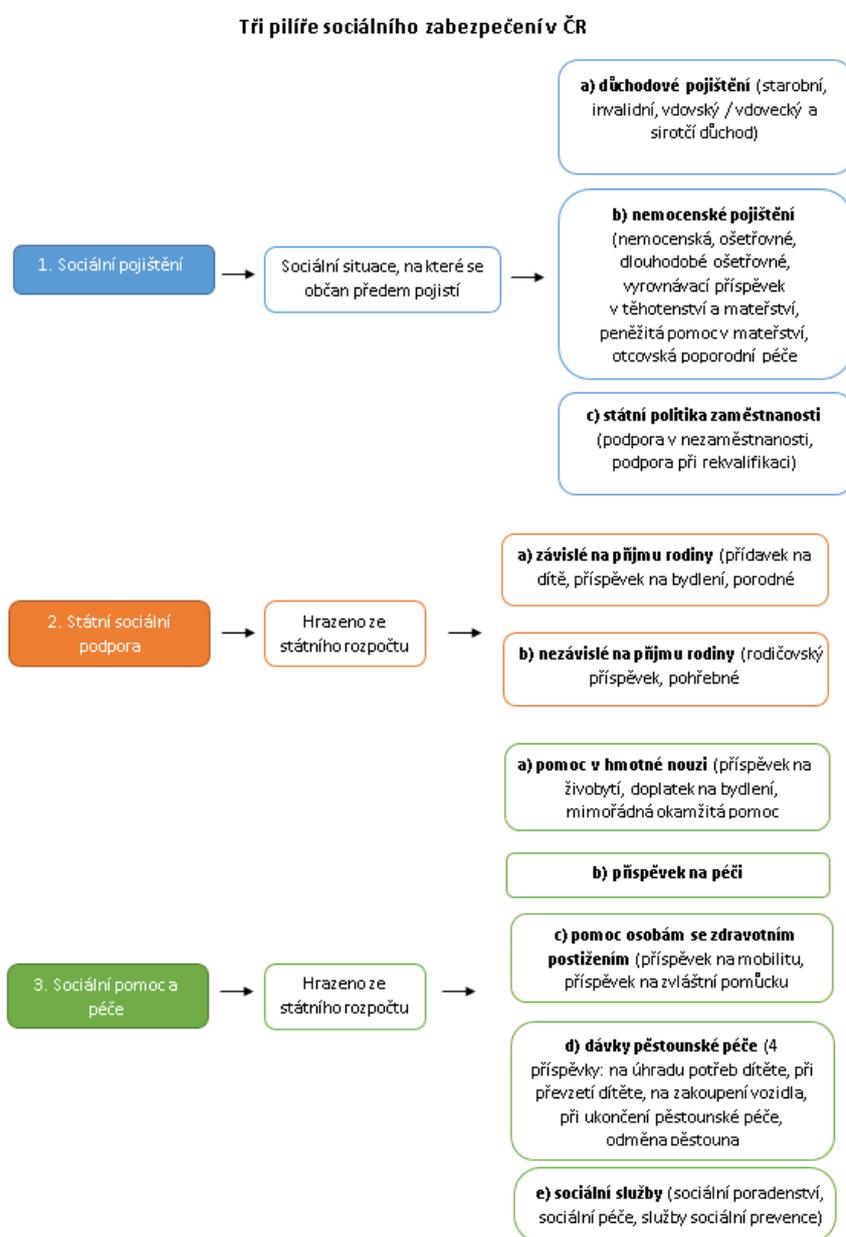
Socially excluded localities (hereinafter referred to as "SEL") in the CR are associated with:

- *Spatial exclusion* - closed, isolated localities with a low level of housing and insufficient civic amenities. As of 2006, there were 310 SVL in 167 municipalities in the Czech Republic. Over the years, there has been an increase and SVL has doubled, today SVL consists of about 600 localities without a few in 300 municipalities. 80% of their population are Roma.
- *Low level of education* - children lack sufficient study support and motivation to get an education and an idea of the benefits of employment, which leads to some pupils leaving school before completing primary education.
- *Difficult access to legal forms of gainful activity* (brigades, employment) - the highest unemployment rate is 5.78% in the Ústí nad Labem Region, 5.69% in the Karlovy Vary Region and 5.63% in the Moravian-Silesian Region. The lowest unemployment, on the other hand, was 2.55% in the Pardubice Region, 2.92% in the Vysočina Region and 2.95% in the Hradec Králové Region.
- *Difficult access to a decent form of housing* - 65% of Roma feel discriminated against in access to housing. The level of perceived discrimination in housing is the second highest in the CR.
- *Dependence on social benefits and related poverty* - The number of people (majority and minority) at risk of income poverty in 2018 was 996,000 people. One of the most vulnerable groups in terms of poverty is the Roma. As many as 58% of Roma in the Czech Republic in 2016 were at risk of income poverty. Compared to the income poverty rate of the general population in 2016, which was 9.7%, Roma were at risk of poverty six times more often.
- *The lack of financial literacy* - frequent stopping of property and borrowing money at high interest (usury, fast loans). As many as 87% of Roma have some difficulty "making money" and 31% have serious difficulties.

- *Risky lifestyle, poor hygiene conditions.*
- *Greater potential for the occurrence of socially pathological phenomena* (e.g. alcoholism, drug addiction or gambling) and *crime* (increased risk of becoming an offender, but also a victim of crime).
- *Reduced socio-cultural competence* (e.g. language barrier, ignorance of one's own rights and obligations).

## 2 Main part: Social security system in the Czech Republic / Minimum income in the Czech Republic

The social security system (hereinafter referred to as “SSS”) in the Czech Republic is divided into 3 pillars (see the chart below). The SSZ is based on the principle of solidarity. It is generous, it does not neglect all target groups, yet it is very difficult for a layman. Benefits targeted at the same life situation are fragmented into different pillars. E.g. Housing benefits can be found in the 2nd and 3rd pillars and each benefit is linked to the fulfillment of different conditions, which is confusing and cluttered for most people in the target group. Moreover, the amount of contributions and benefits throughout SSZ change frequently, as well as the relevant legislation (to potential and significant changes occur especially before the election). The reform of the current form of the SSZ has been presented by political representatives for a long time, but in practice no complex change is still being addressed, only partial parts of the individual pillars are changing.



Zdroj: vlastní zpracování autorů

Given the focus of this work, we will discuss below the benefits of the social system, which are tied to a minimum income and seek to help people in difficult life situations and prevent poverty. All **amounts of social benefits** listed below are valid as of **June 2021**. The **conversion of amounts from Czech crowns to Euro** is based on the current exchange rate of the Czech National Bank on **30.6.2021 (25,48 CZK = 1EUR)**

## 2.1 Social security system

### 2.1.1 Subsistence and existential minimum

The subsistence and existential minimum is crucial for the calculation of most social benefits in the 2nd and 3rd pillars of the SSS. The issue of the subsistence and existential minimum in the CR is regulated by Act No. 110/2006 Coll., The subsistence and existential Minimum Act.

**The existential minimum** is the minimum income threshold that is considered necessary to ensure the basic necessities of life at a level that enables survival. Every citizen of the Czech Republic over the age of 18 is entitled to the existential minimum. The existential minimum cannot be used most often for a dependent child, for persons with a retirement pension, for persons with a disability pension in the 3rd degree and for persons over 68 years of age. By law, all citizens of the Czech Republic who are not directly active in improving their living situation are entitled to a existential minimum. This means that the existential minimum is given to persons who do not seek to increase their income from their own work, do not work, although there is no objective reason not to work, who do not attend regular meetings without proper excuses to the LO employee.

At present, the amount of the subsistence minimum in CZK per month is 2490 CZK / 98 EUR. In 2012, the amount was CZK 2,200 / EUR 86 and was not increased by CZK 290 / EUR 11 until 2020, for the total amount of 2490 CZK / 98 EUR. This amount is very low, it cannot even be enough to cover the basic needs of the individual. According to the Czech government, this amount should motivate people to actively participate in the work process. Therefore, the deputies of the Czech Republic at least propose their increase.

**The subsistence minimum** is the minimum limit of people's monetary income to provide for the basic necessities of life - nutrition, hygiene and clothing. A dependent child, persons with a retirement pension, persons with a 3rd degree disability pension and persons over 68 years of age are always entitled to it. This institute was introduced for greater motivation for adults in material need. If an adult actively works to improve his / her life situation, attends regular meetings with the LO employee and actively seeks employment, he / she is allocated a higher amount than the existential minimum - i.e. the subsistence minimum.

*Amounts of the subsistence minimum in CZK for individuals per month: CZK 3 860/ 152 EUR*

*Amounts of the subsistence minimum in CZK for jointly assessed persons per month.* The subsistence minimum amounts for jointly assessed persons are graded according to the order of persons. First, persons who are not dependent children and then persons who are dependent children are assessed:

- First jointly assessed person in the same household CZK 3550 / 139 EUR
- For second and subsequent jointly assessed person in the same household CZK 3 200/ 126 EUR
- For a dependent child under the age of 6 years CZK 1970/ 77 EUR, 6 – 15 years CZK 2420/ 95 EUR, 15 – 26 years CZK 2770/ 109 EUR

The subsistence and existential minimum does not include the cost of housing, such as rent, energy costs. Example: An individual who is long-term unemployed, does not actively look for a job, or does not attend LO meetings on the given date, thus does not meet the conditions for other entitlement benefits from state

social support or material need, such as subsistence minimum, living allowance, allowance on housing, housing supplement. Thus, for a certain period of time, he receives only the existential minimum of CZK 2,490 / EUR 98. This amount is completely insufficient for individuals, it does not cover the basic needs of man. Such a person finds himself in great poverty.

On the other hand, an individual who is actively looking for a job and regularly attends meetings at LO meets the conditions for granting benefits, does not receive an existential minimum but directly a subsistence minimum of 3860 CZK / 152 EUR and is entitled to other benefits, which together with the subsistence minimum an amount often equal to or even higher than the minimum wage from employment, which currently amounts to CZK 15,200 / EUR 597. Then this system is not entirely motivating for individuals to look for a job. If they add travel expenses, work equipment, etc., then the question is, is such a low minimum wage motivating individuals?

Example:

- a) Existential minimum: an individual who does not show interest in employment is unemployed for a long time, receives an existential minimum of CZK 2 490/ 98 EUR. This individual lives in a common household with a dependent child at the age of 5, who is, however, entitled to a existential minimum of CZK 1 970/77 EUR. The total amount of jointly assessed persons in this case is CZK 4 460/ 175 EUR.
- b) Subsistence minimum: an individual who is actively looking for a job and regularly attends meetings at the LO receives a subsistence minimum of CZK 3 860/ 152 EUR. This individual lives in a common household with a dependent child aged 5 years, which has a subsistence minimum of CZK 1 970/ 77 EUR. The total amount of jointly assessed persons in this case is CZK 5,830/ 228 EUR.

These two examples clearly show that if a person is active, cooperates with LO and is interested in improving his life situation, he is motivated by a higher amount than a person who does nothing objectively to improve his life situation. The difference in the examples is CZK 1 370/ 53 EUR per month.

State social support benefits (2nd pillar) and benefits for assistance in material need (3rd pillar) are financed from the state budget. Benefits are paid by the LO (hereinafter referred to as the "LO") under the same conditions throughout the country. The regional branches of the LO assess the situation of a person in need at his request. The applicant for this benefit is obliged to submit this application on the prescribed form available at the branches of the LO or online on the website of the LO - Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. A decision on whether or not to grant a benefit will be issued upon application. A complication for clients is that the individual pillars are divided into individual agendas at the LO, which means that the client must submit an application for the state social support agenda and fill in the appropriate forms and apply separately for the material assistance benefit agenda.

When assessing entitlement to a state social support benefit or a benefit for assistance in material need, a so-called *benefit procedure* takes place, which usually lasts 30 days. The LO may conduct a local investigation within the benefit proceedings. The local investigation takes place at the place of current residence of the Beneficiary. The applicant is obliged to let the LO employee into his / her residence. In many cases, even when the date of the local survey is announced, the Applicant for the benefit is not present at the place of residence and it is not possible to carry out a local survey. This creates a delay in the benefit proceedings or may even lead to the rejection of the benefit application. Furthermore, the employee of the LO may invite the Applicant to supplement other documents to the application or invite the applicant for a personal visit. In these cases, the deadline for issuing the decision is extended to 60 days. In proceedings for the Extraordinary Immediate Assistance benefit, the LO should decide without delay.

A person who has already granted social benefits must subsequently update some of them repeatedly (usually every 3 months - that is, for the last quarter) and submit the required information for the application to the employment office, which is often a problem and often leads to outages benefits. Typically, this applies to the housing allowance and the housing supplement. The person must report every change (new lease, amendments to the contract, change in the amount of energy deposits, etc.) In our experience, apartment owners in many cases conclude a lease with the tenant for only one month. A person then has to apply for a housing allowance or housing supplement repeatedly every month, or to provide new information, which is perceived by many as very discriminatory. Contracts concluded in this way are usually in the socially excluded localities of the Roma ethnic group.

Subsequently, a person to whom social benefits have already been granted is obliged to attend regular meetings with an employee of the LO. These meetings are usually more frequent at the beginning, e.g. every week, then the interval is extended to a month or more. In the absence of a meeting, he may be excluded from the records of the LO and the person may lose social benefits for 3 - 6 months.

Adherence to deadlines, fulfillment of obligations within the framework of updates of all life changes and life situations in connection with social benefits is generally a problem for the Roma. On the one hand, our experience shows that in most cases these are large families, in the household there is often only a mother. The mother solves a lot of her problems and worries, especially in the care of children, then she forgets about appointments. These people also migrate very often, usually losing the necessary papers and documents. Most often, however, we encounter the fact that the Roma do not understand the employees of the authorities what they require of them, they cannot fill in the forms correctly due to very low competencies. He cannot describe his situation correctly, then the official does not evaluate his situation correctly. Especially in the authorities, the Roma feel discriminated against.

Another option that is offered to persons is the so-called Public Service, kept under the LO. A person who otherwise does not actively participate in improving his living situation and is dependent on the subsistence minimum can work 20 hours of public service in one month and thus reach the amount of the subsistence minimum. If a person works a total of 30 hours of Public Service per month, the amount will be increased by an additional CZK 605 in a given month.

### **2.1.2 First pillar: Social insurance - state employment policy**

The social insurance system, specifically the area of state employment policy, is not the subject of this work, therefore we will not deal with this first pillar further in the work.

### **2.1.3 The second pillar: State social support**

The system of state social support is regulated by Act No. 117/1995 Coll., The Act on State Social Support, as amended. It is about helping families with dependent children in difficult social situations (for example, insufficient income, care for a newborn child, incomplete family, etc.), for which the family is not enough to solve it on its own. It also includes assistance to a person or people on low incomes to cover housing costs.

**a) Child allowance:** The benefit belongs to a dependent child living in a family whose income does not exceed 2.7 times the amount of the family's subsistence minimum in the previous calendar year (from 1.7.2021 a planned increase to 3.4 times). Parental allowance is also considered as family income. **The amount of the child allowance** is paid according to the age of the dependent child:

- aged 0–6 years: CZK 500/ 20 EUR
- 6–15 years: CZK 610/ 24 EUR
- 15–26 years: CZK 700/ 28 EUR

If at least one of the parents is employed, the specific amount of each allowance is higher by CZK 300/12 EUR (from 1.7.2021 the amount increases to CZK 500/20 EUR).

- b) Housing allowance:** A person is entitled to housing allowance, under conditions where the amount of the family rent is higher than 30% of the family's total income. **The amount of the housing allowance** is calculated based on total family income and housing costs for the previous calendar quarters.
- c) Parental allowance:** The parental allowance belongs to the parent who takes care of the child who is the youngest in the family, up to the age of 4 of this child. The parent's income is not monitored. The caring parent can be gainfully employed or a student. **The amount of the parental allowance** is a total of CZK 300 000/ 11 774 EUR (CZK 450 000/ 17 661 EUR for twins and multiples).
- d) Birth grant:** The benefit belongs to a family whose income in the previous calendar quarter did not exceed 2.7 times of the subsistence minimum. **The amount of the birth grant** is CZK 13 000/ 510 EUR for the first live-born child and CZK 10 000/ 393 EUR for the second live-born child.
- e) Funeral:** If the person sent a funeral to a dependent child or to a person who was the parent of a dependent child. The amount of the funeral is CZK 5 000/ 196 EUR.

#### 2.1.4 The third pillar: Social assistance and care - Assistance in material need

Within the 3rd pillar, we will deal only with the area of the system of assistance in material need, which is regulated by Act No. 111/2006 Coll., The Act on Assistance in Material Need, as amended. A person in material need can be considered a person who does not have sufficient income and the overall social and property conditions do not allow the satisfaction of basic living needs. The person is in a difficult life situation which he is not able to handle on his own. He cannot increase his income by his own efforts and is therefore at risk of social exclusion.

- a) Living allowance:** Serves to provide basic necessities (food, clothing, footwear, basic hygiene needs). Entitlement to the benefit arises if after deducting the cost of housing, the person's income does not reach the living amount. The amount of the living allowance is the difference between the amount of the person's subsistence and the income of the person or persons assessed jointly. The amount of living allowance is determined for each person separately and is based on the subsistence and existential minimum. A person can increase his / her subsistence allowance if he / she performs a so-called public service - see above.
- b) Housing supplement:** The housing supplement is paid in cases where the family's income is not sufficient to cover the cost of housing. The benefit is provided on the basis of proof of use of the property by a lease agreement. In the case of this benefit, permanent residence in the property is not necessary. The condition is to obtain the right to a living allowance, i.e. the person must be in material need. The amount of the housing supplement is set so that after paying the housing costs (rent, housing-related services, energy supply), the person has a living amount (maximum 80% of the rent).
- c) Extraordinary immediate assistance:** This is a single dose. It is intended for people who have found themselves in material need, have got into one of the following life situations. It takes into account the person's income, as well as the overall socio-economic conditions. The law provides for six situations in which a person may claim this benefit:
  - *Serious damage to health* - in an amount that will supplement the person's income up to the existential minimum.
  - *Serious extraordinary event* (natural disaster, fire,...). It can be provided up to a maximum of CZK 57,900/ 2 272 EUR
  - *To cover the necessary one-off expenses* (accommodation, fare, administrative fee,...). Can be provided up to the amount of this one-time expense.
  - *To cover the necessary basic items of long-term needs* - Can be provided up to the amount of these expenses, but up to a maximum of CZK 38,600/ 1 515 EUR

- *To cover the costs of education and hobby activities of a dependent child, activities with social and legal protection of children.* They can be provided up to the amount of these expenses, but up to a maximum of CZK 38,600/ 1 515 EUR
- *Threats to social exclusion* (person released from detention, detention, imprisonment, medical treatment center, protective or institutional care,...). They can be provided up to the amount of CZK 1000/ 39 EUR. During the year, the benefit may be provided repeatedly, up to a maximum of CZK 15,360/ 603 EUR.

Examples of the amount of social benefits for people in material need:

- a) An individual:**
- Housing costs (rent, energy and related services) CZK 10 000/ 392 EUR
  - Housing allowance (state social support benefit) CZK 7 440/ 292 EUR
  - Paid living allowance CZK 3 860/ 151 EUR (individual living wage)
  - Other income (for example, from a brigade) CZK 0/ 0 EUR
  - Supplement for housing CZK 2 560/ 100 EUR
- = Total monthly income: CZK 13 860/ 544 EUR

After deducting the cost of housing, the individual will be left with CZK 3860/ 151 EUR the amount of living with which the individual must make a living in a given month, which is CZK 128 / 5 EUR 1 day. The World Bank has set the lowest funding limit per day at \$ 1.90 / day, which is \$ 41 / day. Our example shows that an individual, after deducting housing costs, has a balance of CZK 128 / 5 EUR/ 1 day.

- b) An example of a family from our practice:**
- Father - long-term unemployed, with a granted subsistence minimum of CZK 2 490/ 98 EUR
  - 1. unsupported child up to 6 years - CZK 1 970/ 77 EUR
  - 2 dependent child up to 15 years – 2 420 + 2 420 = CZK 4 840/ 190 EUR  
= The living allowance is 10 130 CZK/ 398 EUR
  - The mother - currently on parental leave - receives a parental allowance of CZK 6 250/ 245 EUR (the total amount of the parental allowance is divided into 4 years, which is usually the time that our clients choose)
  - Child allowances - 500 + 610 + 610 = CZK 1 720/68 EUR
  - Housing costs CZK 18 000/ 706 EUR
  - Housing allowance CZK 12 635/ 496 EUR
  - Housing supplement CZK 105/ 4 EUR
- = The balance of the family per month is CZK 12840 / 504 EUR, which is CZK 428/17 EUR per day.

The examples and calculated amounts are indicative and only serve to better understand and imagine the minimum income. The specific amount of benefits is assessed completely individually by an employee of the LO. This means that two individuals in a seemingly identical situation can be judged differently. For example, one worker can evaluate an individual as inactive, without interest in finding a job, solve his situation and grant him only a subsistence minimum. Another worker evaluates the situation differently and assigns the individual a existential minimum. The person has the right to appeal if he does not agree with the Decision of the LO. However, our experience shows that Roma rarely file appeals. Firstly, because they do not know at all that they can file an appeal, they do not read the Decision, they do not understand its content. Another reason is that they will not receive the Decision at all, because they no longer live in the place of residence, which was stated at the LO. Subsequently, he comes to our services late, when the deadline for appeal has passed.

## 2.2 Minimum income in the Czech Republic

The following paragraphs, which deal with the minimum income from employment, are presented in order to illustrate the whole issue of the minimum income in the Czech Republic in general. By getting acquainted with the minimum income from employment, we mainly try to point out that in our republic the minimum wage from employment is very low and in many cases the family's income on social benefits is equal to or higher than the minimum income from employment, which is strongly demotivating for people who are registered at the employment office in general.

If we look at the minimum income from the point of view of income from employment, this situation is quite problematic with regard to the target group. Discrimination manifests itself significantly in the search for employment and employment of Roma in general, especially in the quality of employment. A large part of the target group also prefers illegal employment, due to the elimination of the threat of stopping the payment of social benefits. We also encounter situations where Roma do not "pay off" their work, often because they have execution, which will then be automatically deducted from their income from employment. The minimum wage, which amounted to CZK 15,200/597 EUR as of 1 January 2021, is relatively low, especially in connection with a low non-seizable amount in executions. Currently, trade unions are negotiating to increase the minimum wage to CZK 18,000/ 706 EUR so that employment for people in the CR is more advantageous than staying on social benefits. In order to equal 50% of the average salary in EU countries, the minimum wage would have to be increased by at least CZK 18,700/ 734 EUR.

Another situation associated with employment within the target group is short-term work. This is mostly seasonal work, where Roma are employed mainly on construction sites, etc. This is temporary, precarious work, the risk of which is that after its termination there is no entitlement to Unemployment support and there may be a significant reduction in social benefits.

However, most people in the target group are long-term unemployed. The reasons are different. Despite incomplete basic education, low motivation to study or learn in the field, through negative patterns in the family to discrimination in the labor market itself, where Roma face rejection due to their ethnicity and society's prejudices. The supply of jobs often does not meet the demand and qualifications of the inhabitants of socially excluded localities.

## 2.3 Barriers to access to a minimum income with a focus on the Roma and incentives for improvement

In assessing the barriers to access to the minimum income with a focus on the Roma, we draw on our many years of experience in working with this target group. As part of the Social Activation Service for Families with Children service, which is part of the Vzájemné soužití organization, we have supported a total of 1,064 families since 2008, mostly of the Roma ethnic group, at risk of social exclusion or socially excluded. As of June 2021, we are working with 120 families and 360 children.

Roma awareness of the social benefits system is at a basic level. Our experience shows that Roma know what social benefits exist and where they can apply for them. The problem arises in the essentials of the benefit application. **Due to low education and low social competencies**, forms are often incomprehensible to Roma, they cannot fill them in, they do not know where to fill in what information, because they do not understand the label. In practice, we then encounter a situation where the employee of the LO does not know how to communicate with a Roma applicant, or is not willing to help solve his difficult situation. Here we can also talk about the element of discrimination. In addition to the necessary application, it is necessary to provide attachments for various benefits, such as a lease agreement, proof of income, etc. Here again, we can talk about the frequent reluctance of the employee of the LO with each such claimant to solve the situation and help with the complete processing of the application.

Here we can also talk about the element of discrimination. On the other hand, it is necessary to add that the laws of the Czech Republic are valid for everyone equally. Many of the obstacles that our Roma clients often encounter are not so much discrimination as non-fulfillment of required obligations, which they often do not understand or attach such importance to due to low education and low social competencies, do not think about the consequences. Subsequently, we often encounter reluctance, reluctance and misunderstanding on the part of LO staff towards the Roma ethnic group. The line between this and discrimination is then very thin.

An example from practice: *The client asked for Extraordinary Immediate Assistance. After her past experience, she asked an organization's field worker to accompany her. This worker was also Roma. At the LO, the client was rejected with her application due to the incomprehensibility of the justification of the application and was told that she was not entitled to the benefit. The worker also refused to talk to the client or the field worker. Subsequently, a social worker from our organization - a non-Roma ethnic group - was invited, who went together with the client to the head of the department. The manager's approach was already slightly different and she told the client where she had errors in the applications and why the application was not accepted. Subsequently, the client went to the LO employee to politely request a new form. The worker dismissed her uncomfortably. However, as soon as she saw a social worker of our organization, a non-Roma ethnic group, who did not even have to say anything in the doorway, her behavior changed immediately and she handed over the required form to the client. Here we see a very thin line between reluctance, dislike and disinterest to work with some Roma clients, and discrimination or anti-Gypsyism.*

We find **discrimination** in the true sense of the word in the Czech Republic more in the issue of **housing**. In most cases, our clients from the Roma ethnic group, but also from the Roma in general, face the problem that, due to their ethnicity, they are rejected from proper forms of housing in a majority society. So they often have no choice but to resort to the often unworthy living in SVL or in hostels. They are often refused both because of their ethnicity and because they are unemployed and thus have no regular income outside of social benefits. There are also problems with multiple families, who are rejected from the proper forms of housing for the number of children on the grounds that the number of people would not meet the hygienic standards for the number of people per m<sup>2</sup>. The owner agrees to the inspection and states the apartment as still vacant, but as soon as the employee mentions, for example, a typical Romani surname or directly states that it is a Romani family, the landlord immediately withdraws the offer and rejects such a potential tenant. Our clients - Roma, thus fall into the hands of the so-called traders with poverty, who offer them housing, but often in very unsatisfactory conditions and at a rent that is twice as high as the rent common for the locality. Here we see a full-blown element of anti-Gypsyism and discrimination among the Roma.

Another obstacle to obtaining the required social benefits is the cultural diversity of the Roma. Some Roma, in a situation where they feel reluctant to help the LO employee, show their temperament, when they may be noisier, they can start speaking in Romani because they feel rejected and do not know how to deal with the situation in order to help them. As a result, such an applicant often leaves without a claim and without social security benefits.

An obstacle that Roma can continue to encounter in practice is the transfer of agendas to the so-called **online sphere**. Many Roma do not have access to the Internet, do not own a computer, or cannot use such technology. This problem does not only affect the Roma but also the elderly, especially the elderly, who cannot work with a computer or smartphone. Today, social benefits are paid mainly to a bank account. However, many Roma do not have a bank account. In cases where a person does not have a bank account, he or she can apply for the payment of social benefits in the form of a so-called postal slip. This will be paid to him at all Czech Post branches upon presentation of a valid ID card. In practice, we often find that our clients often lose or their documents are stolen. However, at a time when they do not have a valid ID card

and only have a so-called Green Card, which temporarily replaces the ID card, they cannot have their postal slips paid for. Since in most cases our clients do not have a driver's license or passport, they do not have the opportunity to access the money from social benefits. In practice, this may be the case that they are without funds for a whole month. The deadline for processing an identity card in case of loss is up to 30 days. Subsequently, clients must apply for an extension of the postal order and collect social benefits only when they are issued a new identity card. Another element in the online processing is the possibility to submit applications online without the need to visit a branch of the LO. However, this is only an option, not an obligation. People can still normally pass on applications to specific employees of the LO.

A proven solution to these situations is **the applicant's cooperation with non-governmental non-profit organizations** that provide basic and professional social counseling. With the help of these services, applicants can get an overview of what they are and are not entitled to, and the staff of the service can help them fill in the necessary forms. In the case of negotiations at the LO, applicants can cooperate with services that offer support, for example in the form of support and assistance in negotiations. This has proved itself to us many times in practice, and the mere presence of a social worker accompanied by a client has changed the behavior of a LO employee and at the same time helped to alleviate any misunderstandings on the part of the benefit claimant.

We see the impetus for improvement in the introduction of Roma assistants at LOs, who could help build a bridge and remove possible language barriers between Roma and LO staff. The institute of "Roma assistant" is already actively used in some municipalities and municipal authorities, by the Municipal Police of the Czech Republic, also LO is the body where this institute would find its application and help eliminate elements of discrimination and occasional reluctance of local workers to address the needs of Roma applicants. In 2019, there was an institute of so-called Regional Coordinators for the solution of Roma issues in all 14 regions. A total of 157 Roma assistants with an average amount of workload for a given agenda were 0.11, which is insufficient for the effective solution of the problems of the target group, especially in municipalities where the incidence of socially excluded localities is higher.

Another proposal for improvement, which should be enshrined in the relevant legislation, is found in the obligation to **train LO staff in the issue of working with the Roma minority**. The training should focus on the cultural specifics of the Roma minority, language differences, communication barriers. Employees of the LO should also undertake internships in NGOs that work with the Roma ethnic group. We believe that some employees of the LO would be willing to help Roma applicants more effectively, but through cultural differences and communication barriers they cannot establish constructive cooperation.

### **2.3.1 Specific barriers from practice and incentives for improvement**

#### **1. Benefit proceedings/bridging period**

*An example from life: A client moved to a new apartment. The housing supplement was linked to previous housing. The client documented a new lease agreement at LO. This was followed by a local investigation and the subsequent payment of a housing supplement. There is a delay between the investigation and the payment of benefits, during which the client must pay for the housing costs and wait for the benefits to be paid. Many families deal with this bridging period with loans and incurring debts on old or new housing, which in most cases they are unable to repay.*

#### Barriers:

The obstacle is the so-called bridging period, when an employee of the LO has to carry out a local survey in a new residence, which usually lasts 30-60 days. During this period, the applicant is usually without funds and the necessary waiting time deepens his difficult social situation. For example, when moving from apartment to apartment, a person is obliged to pay rent in advance in new housing. As the waiting time of

the local inquiry is long, in practice it happens that people pay a new rent with money that belongs to the payment of their original housing, which creates a debt that they are not able to pay in the future. People often deal with this transitional period by borrowing money or paying rent from the subsistence allowance or child and parental allowance, and they often have nothing left to live on. The bridging period is not just about housing, but we also encounter it, for example, when the parental allowance ends and the transition to a living allowance or when starting a new job and waiting for the first payment.

#### Incentives for improvement:

In the event that the procedure for a Pillar 2 or 3 benefit needs to be extended from the necessary 30 days to 60 days, the Applicant should be paid the extraordinary immediate assistance to cover the transitional period between the introduction of the benefit.

- Shorten the investigation period to 30 days.
- The openness of the authorities to clients would be a great help, but also vice versa, if a person could discuss a possible move with an employee of the LO before it occurs. (However, with regard to our target group, this is not always possible, families often find themselves on the street from day to day).

## **2. Extraordinary Immediate Assistance**

*An example from life: The client lost his documents, wanted to get new ones. The creation of new documents in case of loss is charged. For the fee, the client had no finances, nor anyone close to lending him. He went to the LO for Extraordinary Immediate Assistance, which he had been waiting for for almost 30 days. During this waiting period, the client needed to collect social benefits by post, but Česká pošta did not recognize the client's temporary identity card and the client was left without any funds for the month. The client does not have a bank account and the benefits could not be sent to him in a form other than by postal order. (We agree that in the event of repeated loss, the benefit should no longer be granted).*

*An example from life: Due to the delay of the local investigation, the client was left without funds, does not have the basic needs (food, rent) asking for Extraordinary Immediate Assistance, usually waiting for 30 days for support.*

#### Barriers:

According to Act No. 111/2006 S., on assistance in material need, the benefit should be paid without delay. In practice, however, we commonly find that the time for approval of the application and payment of the benefit is within the limit of 30 days. From our experience in working with the Roma ethnic group, we also find that the employees of the LO reject applicants (mostly Roma) for Extraordinary Immediate Assistance at the door without knowing the reason for which the applicant is applying for this benefit. We emphasize that such an approach of employees is not the rule for everyone, it is an individual case where an employee from an NGO usually usually resolves the situation with the client with a superior employee of the LO.

#### Incentives for improvement:

- In the context of the name "immediate", the benefit should be paid within a maximum of 48-72 hours, otherwise it makes no sense. The law should therefore specify the term "immediately" and the benefit should indeed be an immediate aid.
- Within the framework of this specific example from life, the possibilities for the payment of benefits in the event of loss of documents should also be adjusted.
- The access of LO staff to applicants for this benefit should be individual and professional.

## **3. Housing allowance X Housing supplement**

#### Barriers:

These two social benefits, which at first glance look the same, are very different in practice. The housing allowance is paid from the State Social Support System /2. pillar SSZ/. On the other hand, the housing

supplement is paid from benefits in material need /3. pillar SSZ/. However, in the case of a change from a better form of housing to a worse form of housing (for example, when moving from an apartment to a hostel), the benefit is paid only if the applicant proves that there is no vacancy in the shelters. The LO employee will hand over the list of asylum houses to the applicant. In many cases, Roma who have more children have no choice of accommodation than in a worse form of housing /hostel/ with so-called "poverty traffickers", who are among the few who are willing to accommodate large families but at an unreasonably high rent.

Incentives for improvement:

- These social benefits should be combined and set uniform criteria for them without specifying a better or worse form of housing.

#### **4. Housing / bridging period**

Barriers:

Most socially excluded people, mostly of the Roma ethnic group, do not have the opportunity to achieve decent housing. The reason is the income only from social benefits without a valid employment contract, which is crucial for some owners. Others have debts from service providers and from former rents, which paradoxically excludes them from the possibility of obtaining a social housing, because in assessing the right to a social housing, the condition of debt-free status is in some municipalities. People end up in unsuitable flats or hostels for rent far higher than usual for the area. Although the state pays a housing allowance or supplement from the 2nd or 3rd pillar, it does not pay the rent in full /usually up to 80% of the rent according to the usual place/, families usually pay the rent from living benefits, child allowance, etc. Then they lack the finances to provide for their basic necessities and are forced to borrow money.

Incentives for improvement:

- In the case of housing, in general, not only the valid law on social housing is missing, but also any control of private owners over the determination of the amount of rent, which would correspond to the amount of rent in the given area.
- Another separate chapter consists of hostels, in which people are mostly forced to pay according to the number of people in the room and not according to m<sup>2</sup>, as is usual.
- Last but not least, the introduction of measures of a general nature to declare so-called supplement-free zones is also an obstacle to decent housing. These are announced by the relevant municipality and thus designate the house, street or the whole area as a zone where no housing benefits are paid to newcomers.

#### **5. Poukázky:**

Barriers:

The subsistence allowance for persons in material need is paid in the form of vouchers in a proportion of 35-65%. For those people, they buy groceries in designated stores. Since most recipients of social benefits pay the rent out of their subsistence allowance, they are forced to sell the vouchers illegally at a much lower price in order to come up with the finances, which they then apply to pay the rent. For example: A person must pay rent at a hostel for CZK 12 000/ 471 EUR. He is paid only CZK 8 000/ 314 EUR from the housing allowance and supplement. Then the person has to pay another CZK 4 000/ 157 EUR so that he is not thrown out of the hostel. Then he has no choice but to use the funds to make a living or sell the vouchers. Other times, people have to pay extra for energy, water, gas and other services. These must be paid from their income. Then again, in order not to be fired from the apartment or hostel, they must use the funds earmarked for subsistence. Likewise, if they want to move into an apartment, they have to pay a deposit, which is usually around CZK 10 000/ 392 EUR – 15 000/ 589 EUR and above, and often have to pay another rent in advance. Although a person has the opportunity to request Extraordinary Immediate

Assistance to pay the deposit, he usually does not receive it, because in our experience, the employees of LO want a lease from the new owner. However, the owner will not give the contract to the client before paying the deposit. This puts the client back in the circle and often puts all the subsistence allowance in housing.

Incentives for improvement:

- The payment of subsistence allowances in the form of vouchers rather complicates the even more difficult situation of families. Vouchers in the form as they are set should be canceled, they do not fulfill the required purpose.
- Assess applications for subsistence allowance completely individually by employees of the LO according to specific persons and distinguish where there is a risk and where there is no risk of abuse of benefits, such as families with children, long-term unemployed, pathological gamblers, etc.

## **6. Jointly assessed persons**

*An example from life: In school practice, a teenager received a financial reward. Although this remuneration was small and short-term, it was included in the income of the whole family and on this basis the family's housing and subsistence benefits were reduced. As a result of this situation, the family ran into financial difficulties for another three months before their situation could be reassessed.*

Barriers:

In cases where the family is jointly assessed for the receipt of benefits, there is a problem in any, even extraordinary, increase in income. Families cannot earn extra money in a legal way, children cannot receive rewards from part-time jobs or school internships, as any income is automatically a reason to reduce living benefits. It then takes three months for the claimant to apply for a review and for the benefits to be increased again. Although income is not counted in full, but in about 70%, it still affects the subsequent amount of benefits.

Incentives for improvement:

- We see the solution in the possibility of setting the maximum amount of extra income when drawing benefits for material need, where families will be motivated to improve their living situation without fear of losing benefits that try to ensure a dignified life.
- The reward of the juvenile should not be included in the total income of the family. The system set up in this way is demotivating for teenagers and then prevents them from consolidating their work habits.

## **7. Records at LO**

*Example from life: A client used to commute to a branch of the LO by train. The train was late and the client did not have time to come to the scheduled meeting. The LO employee did not accept the client's apology, even though it was executed within the statutory period of 8 days and, in the absence of a meeting, she expelled her from the LO for a period of 6 months. During this time, the client lost benefits.*

Barrier:

The main obstacle on the side of the LO in individual cases is often a lack of objectivity, bias, indifference of LO workers to the specific situation of the client. Instead of supporting a person in unemployment, their actions and procedures often only complicate the situation for them, even though the client subsequently apologizes. An obstacle is sometimes the clients themselves, who, due to low social and educational competencies, lack of information, cause themselves to be excluded from the records of the LO.

#### Incentives for improvement:

- As stated by the Supreme Administrative Court in its judgment (file no. 4 AdS 109/2013), the employees of the Supreme Administrative Court should take into account the reasons for absence individually and: *“take steps and act in a friendly and objective manner in relation to them”*. The LO should try to support job seekers as much as possible and not to set obstacles for them.
- In the case of an objective reason for exclusion from the LO, the period of exclusion should be shorter or graded according to the degree of offense. Although the law allows the exclusion of the client from the records of the LO for 3 or 6 months, depending on the degree of guilt, in our cases clients are excluded for a period of 6 months (e.g.: from practice, the client was removed from the records of the LO because he did not attend. Due to the immediate hospitalization of a severely disabled minor son, despite the additional proof of medical report within the specified period of 8 days, he was removed from the register for a period of 6 months.

#### **8. Loss of benefits during the retraining course**

*An example from life: The client completed a retraining course on the recommendation of LO. During this time, the client received a benefit of retraining support, which served to cover the costs associated with the course (transport, aids, ..). During the course, he received CZK 1 000/ 39 EUR for an internship within the course. Due to his low competencies, the client did not correctly understand the conditions of retraining and the subsequent consequences of the possibility of reducing benefits in the event of an increase in income within the practice of the completed course.*

#### Barriers:

The problem here is again the same as in the example above. The person has no option to a limited extent of extra income, nor within the one-time reward for the implementation of the course. Everything counts as an increase in income, which leads to a reduction or usually a complete loss of benefits for at least 3 months. In this case, the fact that the person was not sufficiently informed or the client did not correctly understand the employee of the LO also plays a role. The situation is again very demotivating and there is no support or motivation for unemployed people to improve their position in the labor market.

#### Incentives for improvement:

- Although all information on the conditions for the creation and termination of entitlement to benefits is provided in the relevant legislation, it is often incomprehensible to Roma applicants. Often even too professional interpretation of the LO employee is unclear for the applicant. The situation could be supported by the above-mentioned post of "Roma assistant" or a more willing approach of some employees of the LO in negotiations with a Roma applicant. /from practice: NGO staff usually accompanies clients at the LO, the client states as a reason that he does not understand the LO employee, he is worried that he will not be heard, etc./
- Last but not least, setting the limit of the maximum amount of extra income when receiving benefits of assistance in material need.

#### **9. Funeral allowance:**

#### Barriers:

It is a matter of course for many to send a funeral to a family member, especially for the Roma. However, the funeral allowance is intended only for a dependent child or for parents in the event of the death of a dependent child. At present, if, for example, a spouse dies, the survivor is not able to receive this benefit and is forced to pay for the funeral from his own funds, which is again largely from subsistence benefits. Until 2007, this benefit in the amount of CZK 5 000/ 196 EUR was paid flat to everyone who arranged a funeral for a person who had a permanent residence in the Czech Republic.

Incentives for improvement:

- The funeral allowance should be assessed according to family relationships, at the discretion of the area as it was in the past /if the benefit was tested by income, it could be perceived as discriminatory against the majority population/.

### 3 Result

The social security system of the Czech Republic is based on the principle of solidarity, is generous and aimed at various life situations, it does not neglect any target group. For applicants for social benefits, however, it is sometimes demotivating. People, especially the socially weak, at risk of social exclusion, become dependent on social benefits. The amount of social benefits for these persons often exceeds the amount of the minimum wage from employment, which currently amounts to CZK 15 200/ 597 EUR. But we must emphasize here that the system is intended primarily for individuals who qualify for benefits. If a person does not meet the criteria, then he finds himself in poverty, because he is entitled to only the existential minimum in the amount of CZK 2,490 / EUR 98. Furthermore, there are groups of people who are disadvantaged (pensioners, disadvantaged in the labor market, eg age, health status, education).

The unions are now negotiating a further increase to reach 50% of the average wage and in line with the EU minimum wage. The family's income from social benefits with regard to the amount of the housing supplement, when up to 80% of the rent can be paid, is usually much higher compared to the minimum wage. However, in most cases, these benefits are directed directly from the office to the account of property owners. This possibility is currently enshrined in law, the reason is that clients are often unable to set priorities, and they use housing funds to make a living or repay debts. As mentioned above, families often pay rent out of subsistence allowances. They find themselves on the brink of poverty. Many families are bound by foreclosures, then they work illegally so that their income is not ascertained and the funds do not go to cover the execution, or they do not lose their benefits, thus creating the so-called gray economy. In order to have more financial resources, families do not report the exact number of tenants in flats or other forms of housing, break out of family ties, divorce, do not admit to being a spouse living in the same household with regard to the assessment of common persons when dealing with applications for benefit.

As stated in the Strategy for Roma Integration 2021-2030 (which was created on the basis of the EU Strategic Framework for Roma) despite the still high number of paid benefits of assistance in material need, the situation of persons at risk of social exclusion or socially excluded persons is not improving. At least 65% of families living in Socially Excluded Localities live under the poverty line as against 9.7% national average (p71). It has seven strategic goals: to support Emancipation and Participation; fight Antigysystem; guarantee Roma children access to Inclusive Education; improve access to Housing including social housing; greater Employment including opportunities for Roma firms; better Health and, finally, increased Capacity and Resources for implementing the Framework. The Framework does not explicitly focus on social benefits and minimum income.

Data from the Czech Statistical Office show that the subsistence allowance was paid to 71,700 applicants in 2007 and to only 63,300 applicants in 2019. The housing supplement was paid to 25,200 applicants in 2007 and to 33,900 applicants in 2019. It is not possible to find out how many of these applicants are Roma. Firstly, because such statistics are not kept, they are always total numbers. The second reason is the degree of bias of such a possible number. It is common from the Census that Roma do not declare themselves to be Roma. Only a small proportion of Roma admit to their ethnicity. Despite the relative generosity of the social system, the number of socially excluded localities is still growing and so are the socially excluded people at risk of poverty. The imaginary scissors between the poor and the rich keep opening.

Poverty affects not only adults, but also children themselves. Roma families, who are in most cases numerous, despite all efforts to properly raise their children, find themselves in situations where, due to the absence of a decent form of housing and financial means to ensure their livelihood, they end up in the records of the Department of Social and Legal Protection of Children. In worse cases, their children are taken from them and placed in other forms of alternative education or care. In our experience, some families face such levels of social exclusion and poverty that they themselves apply for the temporary

placement of children away from home because, despite a "generous system", they are not able to provide children with a dignified life on their own.

Current practices of the government, ministries, regions, municipalities and other institutions have not yet led to an improvement in the situation and position of the Roma minority in society, even in the context of social exclusion and poverty. Most of the measures put in place to improve the situation are repressive in nature and do not comprehensively address the situation. On the contrary, it is clear from practice that the problem will only deepen. For example, the mentioned toll-free zones. In practice, the repressive reaction to negative phenomena only strengthens the majority's view that the Roma themselves are a source of problems, and all assistance directed to them confirms them in this.

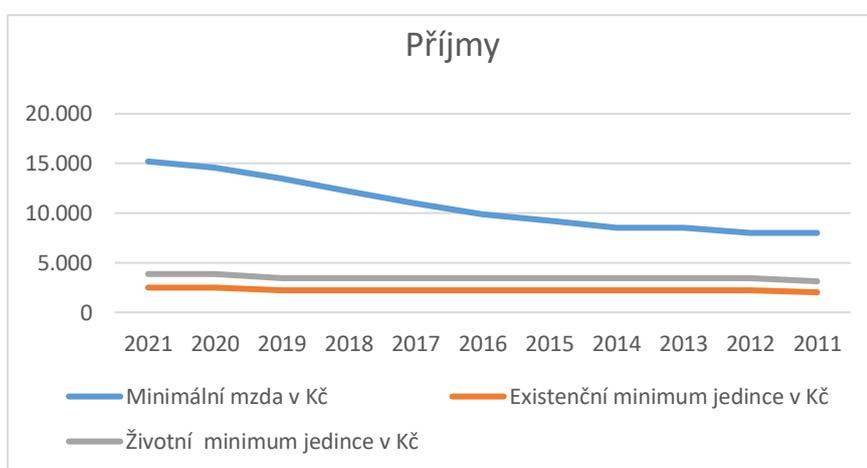
This is accompanied by the already well-established idea that the Roma are lazy, do not want to work and only use the social system. These ideas in most cases stem from prejudices, stereotypes, but also personal experiences. Some media, people or groups on social networks, various blogs and platforms indirectly support these ideas. There is no clear talk of the Majority or the Roma, but the designation of localities, the use of terms such as socially weak, inadaptable, etc., so indirectly point to the group of inhabitants, the majority of which are Roma. Anti-Roma ideas are to some extent represented in society in the Czech Republic. An example can be arson in Budišov - the Natálka case, when a worker of our organization - a non-Roma ethnic group, was the target of attacks on social networks, through news, etc., when they threatened to burn her family, sent her to gas, etc., just because that she was trying to help a battered Roma family overcome the situation. A current example is the vaccination of people in socially excluded localities with the help of a mobile ambulance. This act again provoked a wave of displeasure in some and added only oil to the fire to deepen or consolidate the negative attitude towards the Roma. A great wave of racist comments under the article with this situation broke out on social networks. It is often very difficult for Roma to break free from these prejudices and stereotypical ideas, because some Roma who do not really work are lazy and only abuse the social system can consolidate the negative attitude of the majority society very well. Both Roma and non-Roma work in our organization, and the Roma themselves perceive very negatively if a Roma does not want to work, abuses the social system, and thus casts a negative image on all Roma in general. It is very difficult to break out of this grip, especially for those who want to actively do something with their lives and strive for a proper life.

The inclusion of the Roma and their stabilization within the framework of ensuring a minimum income permeates all areas of social and political life. The possibility of improvement is found in a comprehensive change in the social system. The current system responds slowly, not at all or inefficiently to new situations in society. SSZ can be generous, elaborate in any way, but if we do not look at the issue comprehensively and in detail, but only respond to individual partial negative phenomena, the situation of social exclusion and poverty cannot be eliminated or improved.

## 4 Recommendations

At first glance, it seems that our social system is very generous, it does not neglect any target group. But it is generous only in the context of comparing the minimum wage. The minimum wage is only CZK 15,200 / EUR 597. A person who is in material need and meets the conditions for granting subsistence benefits and other social benefits, then in the sum of all benefits will receive an income that is almost the same amount, often higher than the minimum wage. Then such a person may not be motivated for active employment and becomes dependent on social benefits. If the minimum wage were higher at the level of other European countries, then we would not view the benefit system as generous.

However, each of us may find ourselves in a situation where we find ourselves in material need and for any reason do not meet the conditions for granting benefits in material need, and for a certain period of time we find ourselves almost without financial resources. A person in such a situation is only entitled to the existential minimum, which is CZK 2,490 / EUR 98. The government does not intentionally raise the existential minimum. Since 2012, the increase took place only in 2020, by only CZK 290 / EUR 11. The government has introduced the existential minimum to give more motivation to people in material need. But such a person finds himself in absolute poverty and in a completely degrading, undignified situation.



Zdroj: Český statistický úřad

### Příjmy v České republice 2011-2021

	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013
<b>Minimální mzda v Kč</b>	15 200	14 600	13 500	12 200	11 000	9 900	9 200	8 500	8 500
<b>Existenční minimum jedince v Kč</b>	2 490	2 490	2 200	2 200	2 200	2 200	2 200	2 200	2 200
<b>Životní minimum jedince v Kč</b>	3 860	3 860	3 410	3 410	3 410	3 410	3 410	3 410	3 410

There are also cases where people meet all the conditions for granting benefits, but receive, for example, an extraordinary one-time income, such as a return for electricity, then this amount, instead of serving people and helping them, is deducted from benefits that they would otherwise get.

In order to raise people's living standards, it is necessary to look at social policy in a broader context. On the one hand, we believe that it would be appropriate to reconsider the existential and subsistence minimum. The existential minimum and the subsistence minimum do not reflect the level of inflation and other factors that may affect the increase in the basic needs of the individual. Everyone, regardless of life situation, should have the right to live in dignity.

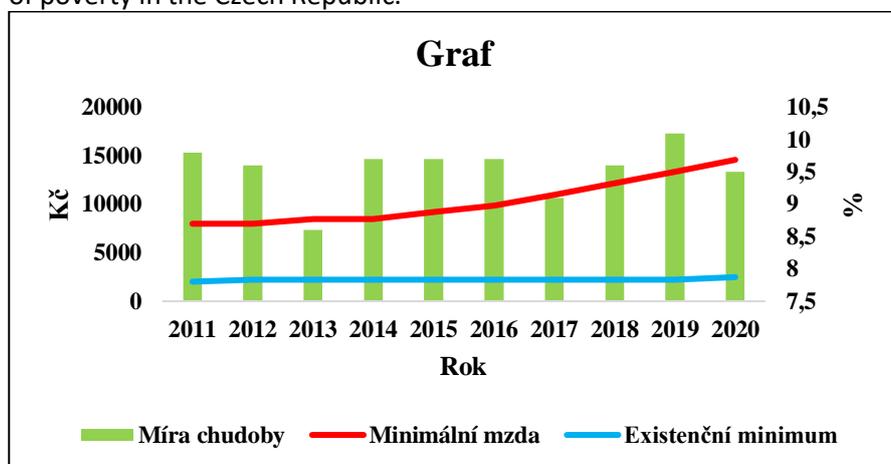
Not all people who are dependent on material deprivation benefits and are unemployed are abusing the system, as this concept is widely coded in our country. We encounter discrimination on the labor market, although it is often impossible to prove / ex: we work in a young team, we will call you, we prefer practice... etc.

Similarly, when receiving all benefits from the social system, there may be extraordinary situations where the family has to incur larger expenses for which it could not prepare in advance. The system is unable to respond quickly and effectively to these situations. Then people, through no fault of their own, fall into even greater poverty and may lose their homes because they do not pay their rent, etc. People who have been active so far and have not used any benefits may also fall into material need in such situations.

Furthermore, there is a need to increase the minimum wage from employment, which as a result is equal to or even lower than income, from social benefits if the conditions are met, which is not dignified for those who seek to work actively.

It is also necessary to provide affordable low-cost housing for socially disadvantaged families, single mothers and the elderly.

According to EUROSTAT, 11.5% of people in the Czech Republic were at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2020, and 9.5% of the population according to the CZSO. As for the children themselves, 13% are at risk of poverty. However, this can be a statistical fallacy. Income poverty is determined as 60% of the median national income. In 2020, this limit in the Czech Republic was CZK 13,640 / EUR 535. The problem is that both EUROSTAT and the CZSO only deal with whether a given person reaches a set income threshold, thus examining the level of risk of income poverty, which, however, does not take into account foreclosure at all. Approximately 720,000 people have execution in the Czech Republic. Then the proportion of children and adults at risk of poverty is probably much higher. It is stated that up to 16 to 21% of children are at risk of poverty in the Czech Republic.



	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>Míra chudoby</b>	9,8	9,6	8,6	9,7	9,7	9,7	9,1	9,6	10,1	9,5	?

Zdroj: ČSÚ

However, the median varies greatly between European countries. It can be deduced from this that poor people in countries with high median incomes will have more favorable living conditions.

This year, the government made a gesture in which it was interested in helping families pay for foreclosures, calling it the so-called "Merciful Summer", when people can from 28.10. 2021 to January 28, 2022 pay only the basic principal and they are forgiven penalties, executor's fee, etc. Many families, however,

have such high executions that they are not able to take advantage of this opportunity. Unless the government addresses the issue of foreclosures and proposes further options for repayment, then people and their children will continue to wander in poverty and poverty will worsen.

At present, we must take into account the current situation of individuals and families, where the deepening of poverty will be affected by other factors that citizens could not prepare for in advance, such as the covid situation and the collapse of energy companies and multiple increases in energy, gas but also food and other goods. These unpredictable situations will have a long-term impact on families and individuals, which in many families with multiple children may lead to survival rather than life. Proof of this is that we are again increasing the placement of children under the age of 3 in institutions on the basis of a court decision, but mainly at the request of the parents themselves, because they are unable to provide basic needs for children and prefer to choose the only option for children. This is very alarming and the government should also take this data into account in its decisions.

	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
<b>Počet DD pro děti do 3 let</b>	25	25	25	27	30			33	34	34	34	33	33
<b>Počet Dětských center</b>	2	2	2	1	1			-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Počet míst</b>	1 178	1 270	1 309	1 396	1 470	1 571	1 638	1 700	1 783	1 963	1 818	1 871	1 871
<b>Počet přijatých dětí celkem</b>	1 552	1 474	1 490	1 559	1 666	1 606	1 740	1 932	2 131	2 077	1 966	1 981	1 741
<b>z toho umístění na základě</b>													
<b>soudu</b>	70	57	62	43	93	43	59	65	63	84	60	64	72
<b>předběžného opatření</b>	196	233	256	250	361	417	474	634	685	644	665	704	572
<b>žádost rodičů</b>	1 286	1 184	1 172	1 266	1 212	1 146	1 207	1 233	1 383	1 349	1 241	1 213	1 097

Zdroj: NZIS

We have been solving the issue of social exclusion and poverty with our clients for more than 20 years. Based on our experience and regular resolution of the minimum income and social security situation, we generally recommend the following changes in the social system, which we have defined with regard to our work and the social service we provide:

- The duration of the benefit proceedings is 30 days. Where necessary, in specific justified cases where the procedure must be extended to 60 days, provide for the possibility of granting an Extraordinary Immediate Assistance benefit.
- Clearly state the period for which the applicant will be paid Extraordinary Immediate Assistance. The benefit should be paid within a maximum of 48-72 hours and specify what urgency means.
- Increasing the amount of existential and subsistence minimum - or possibly shortening or graduation of the period of exclusion from the register from the Labor Office - individually address specific situations and strictly comply with the specifics of graduation defined by law and objectively assess.
- Shortening or graduation of the period of exclusion from the register from the Labor Office - individually and completely objectively address specific situations and the degree of wrongdoing and strictly observe the specifics of graduation defined by law
- Increase the minimum wage so that it motivates people more to apply in the labor market, given the level of the minimum wage, which is often less than the total income on social benefits, people then become dependent on benefits and are not motivated to apply in the labor market. Our experience shows that many clients work part-time, seasonally, in the summer. In winter they are unemployed. Another reason why people are worse off in the labor market is the fact that without education and any apprenticeship, the chances of finding a better paid job are small. As mentioned above, we also face discrimination, although it cannot be proven. Given the fact that a large proportion of Roma have foreclosures, and they automatically start withdrawing when they start work, and the amount they

have left after deducting foreclosure is very low. Therefore, they prefer to choose a job illegally, because they have the opportunity to increase their income, but not to lose social benefits or not burden the payments with foreclosures.

- Determining the maximum amount of extra income when drawing social benefits.
- Unify the agendas of the 2nd pillar and the 3rd pillar and simplify the forms of the state social support benefit and the material need benefit - create a central system and unify the time for submitting the forms.
- Extend the circle of recipients of the funeral benefit to family members and take the benefit into account according to the applicant's income or introduce it as it has been in the past.
- Cancel vouchers or take more account of the target recipient and possible misuse of financial benefits.
- Adjustment of the possibility of benefits payment in case of documents loss.
- Combining housing benefits into one, with clearly defined criteria, regardless of the form of housing.
- The valid law on social housing, or the obligation of municipalities to be responsible for a certain number of social or low-cost housing.
- Control of private landlords for compliance with the amount of rent, so that it is actually based on the normative costs of the usual place and the rent was assessed by m<sup>2</sup> and not by the number of persons.
- Establishment of the position of Roma assistant at the branches of the Labor Office.
- Specify training and internships of LO staff on Roma issues - especially focusing on communication and differences of the target group.
- Unification of internal methodologies aimed at the client of the Labor Office within the whole Czech Republic and their availability to the public - methodologies should be transparent to the public and not only internal regulations, in possible problematic situations it is often difficult to assess whether it is an individual failure, or problem of the system.

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- Zákon č. 117/1995 Sb., Zákon o státní sociální podpoře
- Zákon č. 465/2004 Sb., Zákon o zaměstnanosti

## **6 List of abbreviations**

CR – Czech Republic

NGO – Non-governmental organization

SSS – Social security system

LO – LO