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ROMA

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“Roma access to quality and affordable housing in the Czech Republic 2023”

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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_2_008_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
<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/ostlava/zpravy/petice-za-schvaleni-doplatku-na-bydleni.A150615_161515_ostlava-zpravy_jog

1.2 Methods and tools

Our research is primarily based on many years of experience working with vulnerable families and children. Since 2006, we have provided support to 1174 mainly Roma families with children. The families are in a very difficult situation, they live mostly in socially excluded locations or in hostels. Most families have very low competences in terms of raising children, education, and access to their own health. We deal with the same problems with families all the time. These are problems with housing, finances, children's education, health care, etc. One of the biggest problems is the lack of financial literacy. Since 2006, the problems of families have not changed in any way, on the contrary, nowadays, in connection with the energy crisis and high inflation, they are taking on ever greater dimensions.

In our research, we used the method of quantitative research using questionnaires, from the data of family file documents, and the method of qualitative research, i.e., case studies. The research took place within the framework of the city of Ostrava and its SEL. Together with adult respondents from socially excluded locations and hostels, we filled out 518 questionnaires /return rate 100%/. Another 9 organizations participated in the research, which provided us with data from their statistics, namely Charita České Budějovice, ROMA Servis Brno, ROMODROM Brno, Citizenship Counseling Center Ústí nad Labem, Citizenship Counseling Center Ostrava, SAS Diakonie ČCE Vsetín, EUROTHOPIA, o. p. s. Opava, Regional charity Chrudim, Charity Přerov. These organizations provided us with data from 721 clients. The organizations filled in the questionnaire sent by us and at the same time provided us with data from their statistics. Their outputs matched the results of the data we obtained from the questionnaires of the respondents we approached. The aim of the research was to reveal weak points in housing faced by Roma in the Czech Republic.

1.3 Socioeconomic situation of Roma in the Czech Republic

The situation of the Roma minority is still one of the most urgent problems of social development after 1989. The strategy for equal inclusion and participation of the Roma 2021-2030 follows on from the strategy until 2020, and the aim is to reverse the negative trends in the development of the situation of the Roma, especially in the areas of housing, education, employment, and health. The goal is to accelerate positive changes, ensure effective protection of Roma from discrimination and antigypsyism, and encourage the emancipation of Roma, the development of their culture and language. Together with low education, poor financial literacy, lack of work habits and low legal awareness, in many cases they do not even know a suitable tool to solve their situation. There is a complete lack of long-term planning and setting personal goals for development. This resigned attitude is then transmitted intergenerationally as a learned pattern of behaviour, which leads to the emergence of further generations of persons without sufficient competences necessary to successfully engage in the life of the majority society and improve their current situation.

According to an analysis by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, there were more than 606 excluded localities in the Czech Republic in 2015 and the number is still rising. In Ostrava and in hostels /see below/.

Today more than half of the Roma in our country live in excluded localities. An excluded locality is a place where people affected by social exclusion are concentrated. Such a place can be a city district, a street, several houses, or a settlement. By concentrating Romani people with economic problems in one place, a situation arises where places begin to differ significantly from other parts of towns and villages and an excluded locality is created.

As stated in the Social Inclusion Strategy 2021-2030 issued by the Ministry of the Interior, different groups of society are exposed to different levels of poverty and social exclusion. However, one of the most threatened groups in terms of poverty and social exclusion are precisely the Roma. More than 58 % of Roma in the Czech Republic were at risk of income poverty in 2016, which is six times more often than the risk in most of the society. The highest proportion of Roma at risk of poverty or social exclusion is in areas where all or most of the inhabitants are of Roma origin, which confirms the situation in socially excluded localities, where up to 80 % of Roma live.

The statutory city of Ostrava is the administrative and cultural centre of the region and the metropolis of the Moravian-Silesian Region. At the end of 2021, the population of Ostrava was 279 791 (PSZ Ostrava, 2022).

The population of the city has been decreasing for a long time. The population of Ostrava is aging, while at the same time the population in the working age of 15–64 is gradually decreasing (PSZ Ostrava, 2022). Among other things, higher unemployment and a degree of social exclusion are associated with this process.

The statutory city of Ostrava consists of 23 city districts.

Image: Statutory city of Ostrava and its districts.



Source: Official website of the city of Ostrava (available from: <https://www.ostrava.cz/cs/omeste/mestske-obvody>)

The city of Ostrava ranks among the municipalities with the highest rate of social exclusion in the Moravian-Silesian Region.

Characteristics of social exclusion

13 socially excluded localities can be defined within the city. There are also hostels in the localities located in the urban districts of Mariánské Hory and Hulváky, Moravská Ostrava and Přívoz, Ostrava-Jih, Poruba, Radvanice and Bartovice, Silesian Ostrava, Vitkovice. Localities have both general problems, such as the poor condition of real estate, indebtedness, and unemployment of residents, as well as problems unique to the given place. These can be, for example, impaired accessibility of civic amenities or public transport.

Socially excluded localities in the city of Ostrava:

1. SEL zadní Přívoz (1 000 people)
2. SEL Cihelní, Jílová and surroundings (750 people)
3. SEL Liščina (250 people, of which about 70 people under 18 years of age.)
4. SEL Hrušov (190 people, approx. 70 people under the age of 18) – high rate of socially pathological phenomena / truancy, criminal activity by children, alcohol, suspected drug use
5. SEL Radvanice – Trnkovecká, Pátova (110 people)
6. SEL Bedřiška (80 people)
7. SEL Červený kříž (80 people)
8. SEL Počáteční (70 persons, of which 30 persons are under 18/)
9. SEL Kunčičky (1 500 to 2 000 people) – In terms of population, this is the most populous locality in Ostrava. Current demographic structure of people: 225-300 children under 6 years old, 330-440 children under 15 years old, 150-200 people under 18 years old, 600-800 people under 64 years old and 195-260 people over 64 years old.
10. SEL Sirotčí (700 people)
11. SEL Zengrova, Erbenova, Tavičská, Nerudova (800 people)
12. SEL SOIVA (350 people)
13. SEL Dělnická a Skautská (approx. 1 500 people)

https://socialniveci.ostrava.cz/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Plan_soc_zaclenovani_OSTRAVA-k-pripominkovani.pdf

There are currently approximately 23 hostels in Ostrava, where approximately 2 000 families live, most of them in financial need. From our experience, we know the conditions in which families with children live in hostels, are reminiscent of the characteristics of a total institution, that is why in 2013 we were the first organization to prepare an analysis "Report on hostels in Ostrava or are hostels really a suitable solution for housing families with children and people without a home?" Social hostels as long-term housing for the socially weak, the guarantor of which was the MMR with the Institute of Territorial Development (ÚUR), when we pointed out the negative aspects of people's lives in hostels. We assume that with the sharp rise in energy prices, the crisis with housing will deepen even more.

For families, life in hostels, or in inadequate housing in socially excluded locations, but also in rented apartments, is frustrating. Often several families occupy one room. Children often do not have their own bed or a suitable place to study. The parents of these children are often illiterate or have great difficulty reading and writing.

According to Gabal, social exclusion in relation to poverty represents a kind of tip of the iceberg. In it, material deprivation is combined with barriers limiting application in the open labour market and housing market, limited access to public services, low political participation and, in many cases, with spatial segregation and stigmatization of people who live in these conditions. / Source: Gabal's analysis, May 2015/

A family that moves into an excluded locality takes over the lifestyle and mentality of other residents of the excluded locality, adapts to life in the excluded locality, and subsequently finds it difficult to get out of this way of life. The biggest problem in all locations is expensive and inadequate housing. There is a shortage of both social housing and owner-occupied housing on the market. Renting small apartments is more advantageous for owners. Families must pay a large, often non-refundable deposit and pay the first rent in advance. Lease contracts are often only issued for one month and then they are extended every month according to the payment morale. Families thus live in constant fear and uncertainty of losing a roof over their heads. The apartments in which the families live are unmaintained, often in a state of disrepair. Mold appears on the walls, there is often no heating in the apartments, and basic social amenities are missing. One apartment unit is occupied by several families, it is not unusual for a family with five or more children to be crowded in one room.

These housing units are overpriced, often paying as much as 15 000 CZK /635 EUR/for one room. Families are forced to use part of the money they receive as entitlement benefits for children to pay rent and services associated with the use of the apartment. Families who fail to pay their rent on time are immediately evicted by the owner. The family has no choice but to borrow from the non-banking sector for another deposit and move into another unsuitable apartment in an excluded location. Families move with only personal belongings, only with a "plastic bag", they do not take the equipment of the apartment with them, because they do not have the funds to pay for the removal. Children often don't even have clothes, and families struggle to provide basic living conditions again and again. Families approach these completely unsatisfactory conditions out of fear that their children will be taken away and placed in alternative care. Families thus resign themselves to their situation, resort to the use of addictive substances, and become victims of various loan sharks and executors.

We know from our experience that families are often burdened by several foreclosures, they move in the gray economy in the hope of escaping repayments. They work without a contract, have only occasional part-time jobs, and often do not get paid for their work. Entitlement benefits for their children such as allowances, maternity benefits, one-off child allowance and parental allowance are used to cover housing costs or to pay repeated deposits. These finances are then missing in the family, and the family cannot provide enough food, clothing, school supplies for their children. To be able to provide at least the necessities of life, families resort to inappropriate non-bank loans. People in financial need often resort to the illegal collection and sale of metals, they are victims of so-called "moneylenders", they borrow on "interest".

Families are unable to understand disadvantageous contracts, they often cannot read, they cannot calculate whether they will be able to pay the instalments on time and properly. They solve the situation with another loan. In the event of non-fulfilment of the payment obligation, the family incurs penalties, and the monthly repayments are often higher than their monthly income. Creditors demand their claims mercilessly, they are well informed about the dates of payment of benefits and often accompany them directly to the collection of the slip and insist immediately handing over cash to cover the repayment.

This leaves families with only a few crowns, which is not even enough to buy basic food. They thus move in a vicious circle. The reason for their problems or possible social exclusion is also a possible fear of discrimination, which leads to mistrust of the surrounding world and institutions. The effect of the specific environment of SEL on their residents leads to the fact that they themselves are no longer able, or do not have enough strength and motivation to change their current situation. The negative behaviour patterns of the residents themselves then lead to tension between the majority and the minority.

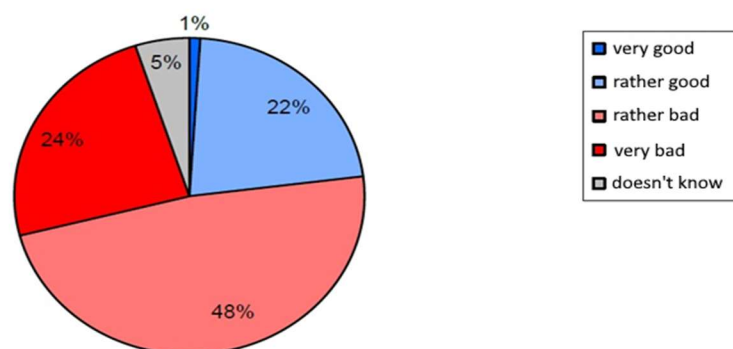
The strategy for equality, inclusion and participation of Roma 2021-2030 uses the term antigypsyism. Living in socially excluded locations necessarily brings with it very negative consequences. For one thing, people here live in absolute poverty, they live in social isolation. Most people are already heavily in debt from the past, in socially excluded locations they get even more in debt to be able to pay the rent. Most of them are without permanent employment. If this condition lasts for a long time, people lose work habits and the values associated with it. They begin to see their life only in a short-term perspective and over time begin to consider their situation normal.

1.4 Why affordable and quality housing in the Czech Republic is important for Roma inclusion.

Quality and affordable housing will guarantee an increase in the standard of living for the Roma, so they will not have to pay disproportionately high sums for housing to the owners of apartments and hostels, for whom it is a big business, in our republic we commonly use the term "business with poverty". Families will then be able to use these saved financial resources not only to cover basic needs but also for a healthier lifestyle and to support their children's education. Decent housing will increase their self-esteem. A good address outside the excluded locality can have a positive effect on getting a job, children can attend "better schools". If the Roma will live outside socially excluded localities, it increases their social status. If the Roma will normally live together with the majority, as was the case in our Czech Republic until 1989, then the majority society will not show signs of discrimination. Both sides will have to find a measure of tolerance and mutual understanding and accommodation. Many of the respondents we spoke to would like to live outside the excluded locality, but because of their different lifestyle and cultural habits, they fear the reaction of the majority society, they know that they are not welcome neighbours.

The research carried out by the CVVM SOÚ of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic shows that when asked how the non-Roma population evaluates coexistence with Roma, less than three-quarters (72 %) of those questioned evaluate coexistence with Roma as bad, and almost a quarter (24 %) of them as very bad. Since 2013, this negative assessment has weakened by fifteen percentage points. The stereotypical view of the Roma population weakened in employment and, on the contrary, strengthened in the case of obtaining housing. The stereotypical view is not conditioned by the socio-demographic status of the interviewees but is related to the (negative) assessment of Roma coexistence with the majority. Less than two-fifths (39 %) of those surveyed consider the government's solution to the Roma issue to be satisfactory, and half to be unsatisfactory. The successful inclusion of the Roma population requires a change in the attitude of the majority, which is a long-term process.

Graph 1: Evaluation of the coexistence of the Roma and non-Roma population in the Czech Republic



Source: CVVM SOÚ AV ČR, Naše společnost 30. 3. – 10. 4. 2019, 1052 respondentů starších 15 let, osobní rozhovor.

2 Roma access to quality and affordable housing in the Czech Republic

Our questionnaire survey and interviews with respondents show that none of the interviewed respondents live in their own home (own apartment, own property), 39 % live in rented accommodation, 23 % live in a hostel and only 2 % of those interviewed live in social housing.

It follows from the above that Roma in the Czech Republic do not have access to quality housing. Many Roma live in rental housing with disadvantageous short-term leases. Another 23 % live in hostels in cramped conditions, unsuitable for creating a stimulating environment for raising children.

From our practice, it is common for our families to have signed contracts with the owners valid for one month, and their further housing depends on whether they managed to pay the monthly rent or whether the owner wants to continue housing them. Such families are not entitled to replacement housing from the owner's side. Families then live in great uncertainty because they do not know where they will be in a month. In addition, a family that receives financial hardship benefits must go to the Labour Office with a valid contract, where a social worker assesses their living situation, and without a valid contract the family will not receive housing funds.

Only a small percentage of respondents can pay rent and utilities regularly. Due to low incomes, unemployment, or poor cooperation with the ÚP.

Another reason for the unavailability of quality housing is discrimination, when most housing owners are not willing to rent an apartment when they find out that the interested party is a Roma. They cite many people in the household, noise, and long-term visits as reasons. Furthermore, they are not willing to accept income that consists of benefits in material need. At the same time, 75 % of the respondents we contacted receive financial hardship benefits.

Although state housing benefits help to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or material deprivation and in some cases prevent social exclusion, they do not support solving the causes of its occurrence. The situation is being abused and real estate landlords are profiting from the support of people affected by the loss of housing.

2.1 Where do most Roma live in the Czech Republic

According to qualified estimates, approximately 250 000 to 300 000 Roma live in the Czech Republic. In the Czech Republic, Roma do not normally declare their nationality, therefore it is not possible to determine with precision how many Roma live in cities and villages. The largest number of Roma live in the Ústecký, Moravian-Silesian and Karlovy Vary regions.

According to the results of the census of people, houses, and apartments in 2021, 21691 inhabitants of the Czech Republic claimed Roma nationality. In the census, the Roma took advantage of the option to register as two nationalities. One of the reasons why Roma do not claim Roma nationality is, for example, the historically based fear of Roma about the possible misuse of data collected en masse by state authorities or the fear of being stigmatized by the environment.

Therefore, it is necessary to consider the different number of people who identify themselves as Roma (during the census or other occasions) and who are perceived as such by their surroundings. According to qualified estimates, approximately 250 000 Roma live in the Czech Republic.

According to statistics Population by nationality and regions, where it was possible to register for only one nationality, only 4 458 inhabitants in the entire Czech Republic registered for Roma nationality. Of these, 837 inhabitants, claiming to be Roma, live in the Ústí Region. In the Moravian-Silesian Region, 768 inhabitants claim to be Roma. In the Karlovy Vary region, only 196 people claim to be Roma.

Our survey and interviews with respondents show that 84,3 % of the respondents come from the Czech Republic and 15,6 % came to the Czech Republic from Slovakia or Hungary.

The survey showed that 72,8 % of Roma families live in rented accommodation in cities. This housing is usually provided by private individuals for the purpose of profit. Our respondents have disadvantageous short-term agreements for this housing. None of the interviewed respondents had their own home. Roma mostly live in cities and in rented accommodation.

2.2 Exposure of Roma to homelessness

A homeless person is a person who does not have a home or the possibility of using a shelter for a long time. Homelessness in the Czech Republic is particularly noticeable in large cities and is associated with extreme social exclusion and psychological and physical hardship. Homeless people are moving to larger cities, where there is also a greater range of support services. The ETHOS typology of homelessness differentiates between persons without a roof/that is, homeless persons as we perceive them in the Czech Republic, as well as persons without an apartment and persons in insecure or inadequate housing.

Now, we do not know how many Roma are among the people who can be included in the category of apparent homelessness, that is, people from the station and the park. Many Roma families and individuals need housing. A person in housing need can be defined as a person who does not have housing to which they would have a legal title or who is in danger of being evicted from housing.

Roma in the Czech Republic belong to the category of hidden homelessness. These are people who hide their homelessness and live with relatives and acquaintances, in overcrowded apartments, in technically and hygienically inadequate dwellings. Roma homelessness concerns Czech Roma and, to an increased extent, Roma who come from Slovakia. They reside in the territory of the Czech Republic without a valid residence permit, they often do not have valid documents, and their chances of obtaining housing are very small. The exact number of homeless Roma is currently unknown. It cannot even be read from the latest population census from 2021. That is because the Roma often did not admit to being Roma for various reasons. Our questionnaire survey shows that only 29 % of respondents know someone who is homeless in their area.

Persons entitled to financial support are:

- who are registered for permanent residence in the territory of the Czech Republic,
- persons who have been granted asylum or subsidiary protection,
- foreigners without permanent residence in the territory of the Czech Republic, to whom this right is guaranteed by international treaties,
- citizens of the European Union who are subject to the directly applicable regulations of the European Communities (Council Regulation (EEC) 1612/68,

- foreigners with a long-term residence permit, in cases where they reside in the territory of the Czech Republic

If a person is alone and has a Slovak identity card, does not have a permanent residence or a residence permit, he is not entitled to financial support, excluding only in an emergency situation, or in the event of a threat to life. If such a person has children who were born on the territory of the Czech Republic, then this person is entitled to benefits intended for children /child allowances, parental allowance/.

They are entitled to assistance if they contact an organization. /Source <https://www.mpsv.cz/socialni-zabezpeceni-cizincu-v-cr>

Example: Czech Roma (hidden homelessness)

A mother and her son live in a one-room apartment in an excluded location. Her daughter with five small children lost her place to live in a hostel. He has been living with his mother for a year with his children and partner. Nine people live in one small room. The mother's daughter has very little chance of getting her own home, also because there is a great shortage of apartments suitable for larger families in the Czech Republic.

Example: Slovak Roma woman (hidden homelessness)

Mrs. M. has been living in the Czech Republic for more than ten years, during her stay in the Republic she gave birth to three children /the father of the children is a citizen of the Czech Republic/. Mrs. M. was assessed by the Czech authorities as a foreign national who is a burden on the Czech social system. Mrs. M. is therefore not entitled to any benefits under the social system of the Czech Republic, she stays with her relatives all the time. For a while he lives with his mother, for a while with his mother-in-law, then with his aunts.

The given examples are not unique. In our practice, we regularly encounter this practice.

2.3 What are the living conditions of Roma

The majority of Roma in the Czech Republic live in unsatisfactory conditions in old, unmaintained apartment buildings and hostels. We know from our own experience that apartments are often damp, and the walls are attacked by mold. 41 % of respondents from our research said that they have dampness and mold in their apartments. 32 % of those questioned said that they are cold in their apartment, they must use direct electric heaters. Unsuitable conditions are caused by the lack of maintenance of houses and apartments. The owners do not repair houses or apartments, they only collect money for rent and related services. Roofs often leak, basements are soaked, the main door to the building is damaged and cannot be closed. The corridors are damp. It all results in unmaintained sewage.

Another problem is the small living space of individual apartment residents. Often two families live in one room – it is not unusual for ten people to live in one room. 75 % of respondents said that they live in only one room with their often-large families.

14 % of respondents live in two rooms and 11 % of respondents live in apartments with more than 2 rooms.

In the hostels, e.g., ul. Jílová Ostrava, we encounter the fact that two to three families live in one apartment unit, these families have common sanitary facilities and a common kitchen corner, but each family has a separate lease agreement and thus pays for one apartment unit two to three rents. We also witnessed the fact that the kitchenette was completely missing in the apartment, and families with children only had a small stove in their living room.

Families pay disproportionately high financial sums to the owners for these dwellings.

Payments for services such as heat, electricity and water are another burden for Roma families. On average, they pay 18 000 to 20 000 CZK/762 – 847 EUR/ for rent and services. Only 26 % of respondents said that they pay rent from their own income. 74 % of respondents stated that they pay rent and services from housing allowances or housing supplements.

96 % of respondents said they have access to cold water and 75% have access to hot and cold water. But these given data may not be based on reality, because the persons are ashamed of their situation and did not have to tell the truth.

A big problem is that families pay large amounts for services /water, electricity, heat/. They do not have their own meters in the apartments. The bill is then billed to individual families from a common meter, regardless of how much the family used for heat, electricity, or water.

Story:

A mother with six children from /4 months to 9 years/ lived in an apartment that consisted of one room and a kitchenette. The walls of the apartment were covered with mold up to the ceiling. There was no heat source in the apartment. The ceilings were wet due to unmaintained drainage on the upper floor. In the winter months, the temperature dropped below minus ten degrees. There were only two mattresses and a pile of blankets for the children in the apartment. The children used the toaster to warm up. The children warmed their hands over the toaster. One of the children misjudged the distance and burned his palms and fingers. It had to be medically treated. Our colleague couldn't watch this situation, and she brought it directly from her own resources.

We tried to quickly find new housing for the family, but it was very difficult due to the large number of children. In the end, the mother and her children had to move to a dormitory, where she and her children live in one room and share bathroom facilities and a kitchenette with another family. Again, they live in very unsatisfactory conditions, but the mother is happy that she is not on the street with her children and that the apartment has central heating and they are warm.

2.4 Spatial segregation and informal settlements

The majority of Roma in the Czech Republic live in segregated housing, that is, in segregated neighbourhoods, streets or apartment buildings. Segregation in the Czech Republic represents the uneven spatial distribution of the residences of a certain social group of the population, resulting from its unequal position vis-à-vis another group or the rest of society. Living in a segregated area reduces the chances of better employment in mainstream society. We call them socially excluded localities.

Roma living in these areas are usually uneducated or even illiterate with few opportunities on the labour market. The limited chances of obtaining regular employment lead socially excluded and segregated residents to special life strategies to adapt to this situation. In segregated localities, distinctive cultural, social and economic attitudes, norms, structures and life values different from the majority population are formed, shared and reproduced. A barrier of mutual misunderstanding often grows between the segregated and the rest of society.

Roma in the Czech Republic mostly live in cities, a smaller number of Roma families live in villages, which the surrounding area perceives as unwelcome neighbours. In the Czech Republic, there are no informal Roma settlements that can be seen, for example, in

neighbouring Slovakia. Roma in the Czech Republic are looking for their homes where the owners are willing to accept them. The result is an uneven distribution of residents of different social characteristics according to their place of residence.

Social differences are an expression of social inequalities, i.e., the unequal distribution of wealth and power in society and the resulting life chances. In general, the majority society considers and perceives the unequal distribution of welfare as justified.

Table:

Changes in the number of SEL in individual regions

| Region | 2006 | 2014 | Index of change | |
|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| (Number of sites) | | | | |
| Hl. město Praha | 6 | 7 | 1,17 | |
| Jihočeský | 16 | 38 | 2,38 | |
| Jihomoravský | 11 | 28 | 2,55 | |
| Karlovarský | 18 | 61 | 3,39 | |
| Královéhradecký | 25 | 36 | 1,44 | |
| Liberecký | 26 | 48 | 1,85 | |
| Moravskoslezský | 28 | 72 | 2,57 | |
| Olomoucký | 27 | 62 | 2,3 | |
| Pardubický | 15 | 24 | 1,60 | |
| Plzeňský | 17 | 42 | 2,47 | |
| Středočeský | 36 | 64 | 1,78 | |
| Ústecký | 63 | 89 | 1,41 | |
| Vysočina | 11 | 13 | 1,18 | |
| Zlínský | 11 | 22 | 2,00 | |
| TOTAL | 310 | 606 | 2,01 | (Increase) |

Source: GAC spol. s.r.o., May 2015, Analysis of socially excluded locations.

2.5 Affordable housing

In our country, buying your own home is unaffordable for an ordinary Roma. The possibility of acquiring own housing depends on the financial possibilities of individual Roma and their families. To purchase your own home, you need to have a large amount of money, two million crowns or more, but only when buying a small-sized apartment. Own family house with land ranges from 5 000 000 CZK/ 211 685 EUR/ and up. Roma in the Czech Republic work in low-paid jobs and are never able to save for housing from their own resources from their modest salaries. Roma, if they are employed, usually earn up to 20 000 – 25 000 CZK/ 847 – 1058 EUR/ gross income.

Another option to buy your own home is usually a housing mortgage offered by the Czech banking sector. The conditions for obtaining a housing mortgage are currently so strict that even the middle class of the majority in the Czech Republic often cannot afford them. If someone wants to take out a mortgage, they must have a financial amount saved up and meet the very demanding conditions of the mortgage banks. Interest rates are currently very high.

From the statements of the respondents, it emerged that 88 % of those questioned do not have a bank account, as the most common reason why they do not open a bank account, the respondents cite debts and foreclosures. They are worried that the funds in their accounts would be immediately blocked by executors.

Another option for obtaining housing is rental housing. Apartment owners are very reluctant to rent housing even to small Roma families. Multiple Roma families have no chance of obtaining quality housing. Under those conditions, Roma easily become victims of poverty traders. In the Czech Republic, a poverty dealer is a designation for a person who rents out devastated or otherwise inadequate housing for disproportionately high amounts. These payments for housing are so high that the Roma no longer have enough financial resources for food and other necessary expenses.

Another problem of the Roma is the disproportionate burden of energy prices, which have risen several times over the past year. It is not unusual for households of Roma families to be without electricity and gas due to the inability to pay high advance payments for these utilities and to cover any arrears.

The questionnaire survey shows that 76 % of respondents had difficulties in finding housing, these difficulties related to a high security deposit, lack of housing finance, energy debts from a previous housing, the owner of the housing did not want to rent the apartment to a family with many children, the owner was bothered that Roma family.

Story:

A Roma family of four with two children. Both parents are employed on a contract and full-time basis. Children attend primary school. The family lived in a house from which they had to move out. The owner offered them the house to buy, but the family could not buy the house because they did not get a mortgage loan from the bank. Their income was not enough to cover the repayments. The family was looking for a rental. Over the course of two months, they conducted twelve inspections of apartments. Although the family had prepared a deposit of 35 000 CZK/1482 EUR/, both had proof of income from their employers, everywhere they went they were rejected. The family did not give up and still had hope, and despite the initial setbacks, today they live in a block of flats among the majority and are very happy.

We draw on our practice and the experience of our clients. We meet by contacting the owner for an ad. At that time the apartment is free. A Roma comes to an arranged meeting, where he is told that the apartment is already occupied. At the same time, upon finding out, the apartment is still free. The owners reply that they have very bad experiences.

2.6 Bureaucracy associated with housing

Many landlords will only rent housing to those who can prove themselves with a signed employment contract. They refuse to provide rent to those who would even temporarily need help in the form of benefits. Discrimination of certain groups of residents in the real estate market is a long-term problem, which is known and talked about, but cannot be proven and does not improve the situation in any way. Disadvantaged are mainly the Roma, who basically have no chance at all to get a regular apartment. 57% of respondents commented that they have problems getting housing.

Ex. from practice: Our experience shows that if a Roma is looking for an apartment by phone, the owners or real estate agents tell him that the apartment is available. When he subsequently shows up to inspect the apartment, he is told that the apartment is occupied.

Roma often only work part-time or so-called "black", if they work on an employment contract, their income is so low that it is not enough for any mortgages or loans from banks. None of our respondents own real estate, i.e., he is not the owner of an apartment or a family house. 87 % of respondents do not have an employment contract, they work part-time.

Hundreds of thousands of people end up in housing poverty, live in peripheral regions where there is a lack of well-paid work, are of Roma origin, have foreclosures, health problems or come from an unstable social environment, and these risk factors are usually cumulative. When an unwilling civil servant is added to this, the applicant for support may find himself without the necessary funds, especially if he is applying for a housing allowance, i.e., a financial aid allowance.

When assessing the right to a state social support benefit, which is a housing allowance, or a financial aid benefit, which is a housing supplement, a so-called **benefit procedure** takes place, which usually lasts 30 days. The Labour Office can carry out a local investigation as part of the benefit procedure. The local investigation takes place at the place of current residence of the benefit applicant. An employee of the employment office may ask the applicant to add additional documents to the application or invite the applicant to a personal visit. In these cases, the deadline for issuing a decision is extended up to 60 days.

Explanation of terms.

- a) **Housing allowance:** A person is entitled to a housing allowance under conditions where the family's rent is higher than 30 % of the family's total income. The amount of the contribution is calculated based on the family's total income and housing costs for the previous calendar quarter.
- b) **Housing supplement:** Supplement for housing is paid in cases where the family's income is not sufficient to cover housing costs. The benefit is provided based on proof of use of the property by a lease agreement. In the case of this benefit, permanent residence in the given property is not required. The condition is obtaining the right to subsistence allowance, i.e., the person must be in material need. The amount of the housing allowance is set so that after paying the housing costs (rent, housing-related services, energy supplies), the person has a living allowance (maximum 80 % of the rent).

Story:

A family with two children had to move out of the apartment. The owner did not issue the termination of the lease due to the amount owed on energy. The family found a new home. She went to the employment office to ask for a supplement for housing, the clerk asked the family for proof of termination of the lease, which the family could not prove. The family was not granted housing allowance, the family had to move out of the new home and currently lives with relatives.

A family with 4 children had to move out of a rented apartment due to the reconstruction of the house. The family could not find an adequate apartment, so they had to move into a dormitory. She was not granted a supplement for housing because she went from a better, higher-quality housing to a worse one. To receive housing allowance, she would first have to contact the shelters. Which, in our opinion, is even more disadvantageous than living in a dormitory. Asylums come under social services. The client is under supervision there and in addition can stay in the asylum for a maximum of 1 year and asylums are usually only for mothers with children and not for the whole family.

We come across such examples often.

2.7 Antigypsyism in housing

The research carried out by the CVVM SOÚ of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic shows that when asked how the non-Roma population evaluates coexistence with Roma, less than three-quarters (72 %) of those questioned evaluate coexistence with Roma as bad, and almost a quarter (24 %) of them as very bad.

The strategy of Roma integration until 2020 already used the term "antigypsyism" for a specific form of racism directed against the Roma, based on the ECRI definition (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2015: 26).

With antigypsyism, she especially associated the violent manifestations that often accompanied the marches of neo-Nazis in 2012, but also widespread negative attitudes and stereotypes of the public, often replicated by the media.

According to the Report on Extremism and Prejudicial Hate in the Czech Republic in 2021, the police detected 108 hate crimes, 26 less than in 2020. Furthermore, 33 crimes motivated by hatred against the Roma were recorded in 2021. In 2021, the Public Defender of Rights received a total of 22 complaints in which the complainants objected to discrimination on the grounds of Roma ethnicity. The Report mentions some specific cases of antigypsyism against Roma, among which is, for example, the anti-Roma march in Hradec Králové. The report also provides detailed information about the media-known police intervention in Teplice, where Roma S. Tomáš died after the police intervened, which provoked several critical reactions among representatives of the Government Council for Roma Minority Affairs /RVZRM/, the non-profit sector, as well as human rights commissioners or representative's public defender of rights.

Public space can be used to suppress antigypsyism and promote equal inclusion and participation of Roma.

Currently, the representation of Roma in elected positions at the national or local level is very low. They are not present in the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, and after the elections in 2021, no Roma will even sit in the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic. To strengthen the participation of Roma in the decision-making process at the national level, the RVZRM and the Council of the Government of National Minorities /RVNM/ continued to work in 2021. Committees for national minorities operate at the level of regions, the capital city of Prague and municipalities.

Source: <https://icv.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/zmocnenkyne-vlady-pro-lidska-prava/aktuality/05-Strategie-romske-rovnosti--zactleneni-a-participace-2021---2030---ukolova-cast---MK-cista-C.xlsx>

In 2021, a new Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation Strategy (Roma Integration Strategy) 2021-2030 was adopted. The strategy sets out thematic chapters that cover inequalities and persistent problems in the main social areas: Emancipation, Antigypsyism, Education, Housing, Employment and Health. A fundamental measure contained in this document is, for example, the creation of the post of Government Commissioner for Roma Affairs until 2022. On December 21, 2022, the Government, by Resolution No. 1093, created the position of Government Commissioner for Roma Minority Affairs, to which it appointed, with effect from December 21, 2022, Mgr. Lucie Fuková.

Legislation in the Czech Republic regulates the Anti-Discrimination Act, /Act No. 198/2009 Coll., Act on equal treatment and on legal means of protection against discrimination and on the amendment of certain laws/ which should protect all people without distinction who face discrimination. We cannot fully prove that the Roma were discriminated in terms of housing. We start from the stories of our specific families, but we strongly perceive discrimination in where the Roma are moved to – socially excluded places, hostels, unrepaired apartments, in what conditions they live /mold, no heating, damaged windows, doors, corridors, no kitchen units, basic equipment, etc., we have already mentioned this above/ what they have to pay for apartments. Mostly, these are completely uninhabitable apartments.

In the Czech Republic, we encounter antigypsyism mainly with violent manifestations that often accompanied neo-Nazi marches in 2012, but also widespread negative attitudes and stereotypes of the general public, often replicated by the media.

According to the Report on Extremism and Prejudicial Hate in the Czech Republic in 2021, the police detected 108 hate crimes. 33 crimes motivated by hatred against the Roma were recorded. In 2021, the Public Defender of Rights received a total of 22 complaints in which the complainants objected to discrimination on the grounds of Roman ethnicity. Some specific cases of antigypsyism against Roma are mentioned in the news, among which is, for example, the anti-Roma march in Hradec Králové. The report also provides detailed information about the media-known police operation in Teplice, where a Roma died after the police intervened.

The representation of Roma in elected positions at the national or local level is very low. They are not present in the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, and after the elections in 2021, no Roma will even sit in the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic. Committees for national minorities operate only at the level of regions, the capital city of Prague and municipalities with extended powers. In 2021, a new Strategy for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation (Roma Integration Strategy) 2021-2030 was adopted. The strategy sets out thematic chapters that cover inequalities and persistent problems in the main social areas: Emancipation, Antigypsyism, Education, Housing, Employment and Health. A fundamental measure contained in this document was the creation of the post of Government Commissioner for Roma Affairs.

<https://icv.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/zmocnenkyne-vlady-pro-lidska-prava/aktuality/05-Strategie-romske-rovnosti--zactleneni-a-participace-2021---2030---ukolova-cast---MK-cista-C.xlsx>

Story:

A Roma family went to the bank to set up an account and applied for a loan to renovate their home. The loan was rejected by the bank, even though both spouses documented their incomes. The problem is that many Roma have a low level of education, so they only get jobs with low qualifications, and the amount of salary or wages is linked to that.

2.8 Forced evictions

It is a common issue that Roma living in excluded localities and hostels do not receive adequate notices of rent without the right to alternative housing. 54 % of respondents answered that they had to move out without housing compensation. The reason for the immediate eviction may be unpaid rent/ often because the employment office did not pay the benefit within the set deadline, or the respondent failed to provide the necessary documents, did not understand the requirements of the social worker. Often the landlord terminates the tenant's contract without any reason. Contracts are normally concluded for one month only and will either be extended or not extended at their discretion. Other times they only have contracts for 1 year. Among our respondents, we rarely encountered that the tenant had a contract with the owner for an indefinite period. Often, the owners will notify the tenants of the notice of termination from the apartment from one day to the next. Apartment and hostel owners use various practices such as verbal intimidation to achieve their goal immediately.

It is not uncommon for the tenant's property to end up thrown out on the street. Often the owner changes the lock, and the tenant is no longer allowed in the apartment. 34 % of respondents answered that they encountered intimidation, arrogance and throwing personal belongings and furniture out onto the street from the owners of apartments and hostels.

Both individuals and entire families are evicted, but people are evicted from entire homes or communities.

Story

Mrs. N with her husband and children were evicted from the apartment overnight. They did not want to leave the apartment because they had no alternative housing. When the family was not at home, the owner locked the apartment and did not want to let the family into the apartment. Mrs. N's husband was severely diabetic and had insulin in the apartment. The owner didn't even listen to it. Mrs. N and her husband visited us and asked for help. Together we went to see the owner, but Ale did not want to talk to us. In the end, the Police of the Czech Republic had to deal with the situation, because Mrs. N's husband found himself in danger. We then helped them find temporary replacement accommodation.

We often encounter cases with a similar course in our practice. The owner locks personal belongings, birth certificates, various documents, personal documents, school supplies for children are often left in the apartments. Without personal documents, the respondents cannot choose the entitlement benefit or the financial need benefit. Children don't go to school because they don't have textbooks, parents don't have anywhere and for what to prepare a snack for their children, and much more.

Forced eviction of Roma – Life stories

Ex. Mrs. M.'s story:

"One day someone knocked on our door, when I opened it, I found out that it was the owner of the house with the police. She told me that I had to move out immediately. My lease hadn't ended yet, I didn't have any debts, I didn't even know that the location would be moving. To this day, I don't know why I had to move out, everyone there had to move out. I was afraid of the police, I had nowhere to go, there was no time, I had to leave now. No replacement housing was discussed, let's just leave now" (2021 – Hany Kvapilové street, Ostrava – Mar. Hory)

Female, number of family members 7:

I originally lived with 6 children without a partner in Ostrava in Mariánské Hory in an apartment building. The house was in a nice location among the majority. The house was inhabited by Roma themselves. I had a rental agreement with the owner for 1 year. I lived there with my children for three years. The owner didn't take care of the house all the time, didn't fix anything. The rent, including services, was around 17 000 CZK/ 720 EUR/. Before the end of the year, the owner told us all that we had to move out within 14 days. As of 12/31, the contract was ending for all of us, so the owner only informed us about the eviction and didn't talk to us anymore. I learned much later that the owner had sold the house. I had to move out with my children and go to much worse and inhumane conditions, where there was no heating, from a 2 + 1 apartment, I was forced to leave with 6 children to a one-room apartment.

Media documented cases of forced eviction of Roma

Přednádraží

Přednádraží (Station front) was a workers' colony on the street of the same name in the Přívoz district of Ostrava in the Moravská Ostrava and Přívoz district. The inhabitants lived in this colony for many years. In 1997, a flood hit Ostrava, as well as Přívoz and the Přednádraží colony. Some original inhabitants moved out; houses were damaged. Mainly Roma people moved into the damaged houses. They were moved there from the center of Ostrava and from Stodolní Street, where the entertainment district began to emerge. Originally a workers' colony, it gradually turned into a Roma ghetto. At the turn of the millennium, the previous owner of Česká dráhy decided to sell the damaged houses.

Families from Ostrava but also from Slovak settlements moved into the house of the old settlers. Changes of owners and faster change of tenants resulted in looting and looting of parts of houses. In 2010, the sewage system damaged by floods burst for the first time in Přednádraží Street. The sewers were so damaged that the houses became uninhabitable. In addition, in July 2012, the water supply to houses in the street was stopped due to the high number of people who did not pay for it, which resulted in protests by those residents who did pay for water. In the following days, the building office of the Moravská Ostrava and Přívoz district decided to evict residents from the houses, as they were, according to him, uninhabitable.

Of the original 400 inhabitants, two-thirds went to live in hostels in various parts of Ostrava. Only a small part received a municipal apartment. The remaining part of the population, supported by social workers and activists, temporarily stayed in the houses. At the end of July 2012, 76 adults and 101 children lived in Přednádraží. But the remaining people also had to move out. Platform for housing was created on Přednádraží Street. The colony was demolished at the beginning of 2019. The residents took this situation very hard. They themselves grew up in the colony and raised their children here.

A similar situation was experienced by people in the settlement of Bedřiška in Ostrava Mariánské Hory, Silesian Ostrava – Liščina.

2.9 Environmental impacts of Roma housing

In contrast to the Slovak Republic, where the Roma are more connected to the natural environment, in the Czech Republic many Roma are located inside urban areas without direct contact with the natural environment. From the point of view of examining the Roma through the concepts of environmental racism or environmental justice (source: Chabada 2013; Filčák 2012; Harper et al. 2009), the Roma settled in places /or were moved to them/ that were not very economically or agriculturally usable. The situation at present reflects a change of opinion, land is considered valuable by society. It is an effort to settle Roma on territory that has no investment, typically construction, use. These are often localities that have been used industrially or otherwise in the past and carry their own environmental burdens. / Ostrava, Most/

Roma currently live near former industrial areas, in buildings that once served as hostels and dormitories for workers. These buildings have not been maintained for a long time and are unsuitable for housing for families with children. All these areas have been neglected for a long time outside of the company's interest, until developers show interest in the area. /Vítkovice – Dolní oblast, Přednádraží/.

Roma are subsequently evicted from places that are lucrative for developers and are interested in exercising their business interests in those places. Ex.: Centrum Ostrava, Stodolní ul. Přednádraží. /The Roma first had to move to Přednádraží /see above/, because it was a workers' colony, and then they had to move out of Přednádraží again, because the houses were razed to the ground and the developers want to assert their interests there again. / These people are mostly evicted without the right to alternative housing. They are moving to other excluded locations in the hope that a similar scenario will not happen again so soon.

2.10 Nomadic lifestyle and travellers

Nomads do not live in our current environment. Nomadism was prohibited by Act No. 74/1958 Coll. On the permanent settlement of nomadic persons. This Act was repealed on March 30, 1998, by Act No. 57/1998 Coll.

There are no plots of land or suitable premises for possible short-term settlement. Written permission from the landowners is required for any settlement. Any temporary settlement in a public place may be punished according to Act No. 251/2016 Coll., on certain offences, as amended (Offences against public order - § 5) damage or unauthorized obstruction of a public space, publicly accessible object, etc.

A certain percentage of homeless people live in our country, they live in various temporary shelters, tents, garages, damaged buildings, in sewers, along the river, under bridges, often illegally. It is not known how many of them are of Roma origin, but it is reasonable to assume that their share is minimal (Own experience from working in an EU project dedicated to the issue of people without adequate housing).

If a Roma family finds itself without shelter, it usually uses accommodation with its relatives. The family then visits a non-profit organization to help them find housing. They will thus approach the asylums together. However, if a woman lives with her partner and children, they do not use shelters, because there is very little accommodation in shelters for the whole family. They appeal to apartment owners, and in most cases their only chance is hostels or houses in excluded locations.

2.11 Consequences of missing legal address

For many Roma, the lack of a legal address means a big problem, by legal address we mean permanent residence. The authorities thus deliver important documents and information relating to the citizen to the legal address. Roma often do not have the correct legal address due to frequent relocations, and so it happens that many do not find out in time or at all information that is important to their lives. change in the benefit system, they are not informed about the amounts owed relating to their person, they do not learn, they do not receive various court orders/.

Another problem is the lack of an identity card. No authorities or institutions deal with a citizen in the Czech Republic without presenting an identity document. It is not possible to open a bank account, it is not possible to pick up any documents or payment slips at the post office, and they do not receive an insurance card.

Many Roma do not have an identity card, often because they lose it and do not know how to get another document, they do not have the finances to renew it.

A citizen's card is issued to persons when they reach 15 years of age. A citizen must have Czech citizenship and, if he is in the Czech Republic, he must state his place of residence if he is registered for permanent residence in the Czech Republic. LIVING SITUATION DOES NOT INFLUENCE GETTING AN IDENTITY CARD. Some residents are regularly reported to the city authorities because the house was demolished, the person lives on the street, etc. /Act No. 269/2029, Coll., Act on Identity Cards/.

The applicant for a citizenship card must present another valid identity document, such as a birth certificate, driver's license, or travel document. Roma often do not have any of these documents and are thus unable to prove their identity. They consider their situation unsolvable, and it is not unusual for them to live without a valid document for many years.

Story

A mother with two children had to move out. The owner changed the lock, all personal belongings and documents remained in the apartment. The owner did not let Mrs. N in. Mrs. N. was unable to use any tools to recover her personal belongings and documents. She moved in with her children with her mother. In the meantime, Mrs. N. received a receipt for parental allowance and child benefits, which were her only financial resources for the security of the family, the funds were not paid to her at the post office, as she did

not present a valid document by proving her identity. The post office sent the money back, in the meantime Mrs. N approached us with a request for food aid and help in processing documents. But for a month she was completely without funds and dependent on the help of the food bank. The Labour Office also did not provide her with help, even though she was in material need, because she did not have documents.

2.12 Housing market – what can be done

Roma in the Czech Republic have difficult access to social housing, and this is because they are often unable to meet the conditions set for obtaining a social apartment. Applicants for social housing must have valid documents, prove that they are debt-free to the city or municipality, must not be in debt for waste, energy, municipalities often find out whether they have debts for past rent and services where the socially weak apply for social housing. Applicants must also prove from what sources they will pay the rent; they require an employment contract. It is also necessary to add that there is a great shortage of social housing in the Czech Republic. Another problem is the fact that social housing is mostly located in excluded locations or in locations that are closely related to them. The Roma live in social housing, but in an environment of socially excluded neighbours, that means without a chance to escape from the socio-culture of poverty.

If the applicant applies for a municipal apartment, he can often get the apartment through the envelope method, that is, the municipality proposes financing per square meter and the apartment is then obtained by the person who offers a higher price.

In most cases, they ask for rent in advance and sometimes an additional deposit.

Currently, the offer of social housing is completely insufficient for people in need. The answers of our respondents showed that only 2 % of them live in social housing.

In the area of social housing, two government concepts are currently valid. The first of them is the Social Housing Concept of the Czech Republic 2015-2025 of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, which contains conceptual and strategic starting points for solving the situation of the growing number of people who are in housing need or are directly threatened by it. Another concept is the Housing Concept of the Czech Republic 2021+ of the Ministry of Regional Development, which represents a vision of state policy to make housing affordable, stable and sustainable.

According to the draft law on social housing, the implementation of social housing falls to the local level, which means strengthening the role of municipalities in this area. In accordance with the draft law, the municipality should establish a social housing fund, decide on the connection to the municipality and the form of support from the system, provide information to the Register of the social housing fund, ensure social housing in its territory, prepare a plan for social housing of the municipality and cooperate with social service providers.

To support these activities, the municipality can apply for financial support from public sources and should conclude contracts for the provision of an apartment in the social housing system according to the Civil Code with another person or legal entity. If necessary, it should also conclude public contracts for the provision of an apartment in the social housing system with another municipality.

Social housing in the Czech Republic is mainly provided by actors at the local level. Developers generally buy land on which they build apartments, which are financially unaffordable for most Roma.

Developers cannot be stopped without legislation and political will. We do not have much experience in this area. But the developers have a lot of space on the market and decisions are made by big lobbies, the city administration and whoever is currently in power.

The housing market – what can be done?

Measures that can help improve the housing market.

- Increase in state investment in the construction of new housing units and modernization of the existing housing stock. This would increase the supply of apartments on the market and improve the quality of housing.
- Creating programs to provide financial support and rent for people with low incomes to have access to affordable housing - drawing subsidies from the EU.
- Creating incentives for the construction of social housing, which would lead to greater availability of housing for low-income and homeless people.
- Increasing the transparency of the housing market
- Reducing red tape and simplifying construction and building permit processes to speed up the construction of new housing and improve market competition.
- Municipalities should take responsibility for their citizens and buy back some buildings and establish social housing - draw funds from the EU.
- Supporting the creation of community initiatives such as co-operatives, owner-occupiers and co-operatives that allow people to share resources and housing costs. This can reduce housing costs and improve the quality of life for members of these communities.
- Creating special programs for young families to enable them to get their first home, for example by providing low interest rates on mortgages or low-down payments on entry fees.
- Strengthening the rights of tenants to protect them from unjustified dismissal, unjustified rent increases and to be informed of their rights and obligations.
- To elect a janitor, administrator, or chairman in houses, as is the case with houses in personal ownership, where they would solve the problems of the house together with the participation of the owner of the house.
- Carry out inspections of houses and flats in their condition, whether these houses and flats are suitable for use. The owners should be sanctioned.
- Carry out checks on how owners set up rental contracts, whether they comply with payments according to the normative costs of the given municipality or calculate rents according to the number of people, whether more than one rental contract is drawn up in one apartment unit.
- Support for the emergence of alternative forms of housing, such as mobile homes, storage containers and other innovative solutions that can be affordable and at the same time offer modern and quality housing.

- Enhancing infrastructure investment in areas with insufficient housing availability, such as smaller cities and rural areas, to improve housing affordability and stimulate the development of these regions.
- Strengthen the role and financially support NGOs that help citizens in housing, so that they can provide help and support for people with low incomes and other vulnerable groups and help solve problems at the local level.
- Increasing support for the construction and renovation of houses and apartments regarding accessibility for people with disabilities and the elderly, so that they have access to barrier-free living.
- Increasing cooperation between the private sector and the state to promote the construction of apartments and apartment buildings on private land while ensuring the quality and safety of construction.
- Reducing the tax burden for municipalities, which will support the construction of social housing.

Although there is no legally anchored definition and system of social housing in the Czech Republic, many municipalities already offer social housing to their citizens in need. Some of these initiative municipalities set up and further developed social housing in cooperation with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, namely within the framework of the project Support for social housing, the main goal of which is the development of the social housing system in the Czech Republic.

3 Conclusion and recommendations

3.1 Attitude towards the National Strategic Framework for Roma

The purpose of the Roma Integration Strategy 2021 - 2030 is to create a framework for measures that will develop the positive changes that have been achieved in some areas of Roma integration and for measures that will lead to the reversal of negative trends where negative trends persist or deepen. The aim is to eliminate all unjustified and unacceptable differences between the situation of a significant part of Roma and the majority population, to ensure effective protection of Roma from discrimination and antigypsyism, and to encourage Roma emancipation, Roma culture, language, and Roma participation. The main objectives of the Strategy are thus closely related to the objectives of the Roma Integration Strategy until 2020 and reflect the fact that these objectives have not been achieved in several areas.

Based on the identified problems, the following strategic goals were set

- Support and development of civil, socio-economic, political, and cultural emancipation of the Roma national minority, i.e., promoting equality, inclusion, and participation
- Reduce the level of antigypsyism
- Increase the level of educational attainment of Roma
- Ensure equal access of Roma to quality housing
- Ensure equal access of Roma to employment

Source: Strategy for equality, inclusion, and participation of Roma / Strategy for Roma integration / 2021 – 2030, published by the Government of the Czech Republic

The goals are quite adequate, but very ambitious. In order for the goals to be fulfilled, all the different entities that would participate had to be involved and have a single comprehensive platform, with one common goal. It depends on the government, which changes every four years, and above all, these are long-term goals, and each government has a different program and different priorities.

This strategy should extend over the electoral period and all parties without distinction should agree on this program and further participate and expand it. This problem is also present in regional and municipal councils, which also change thanks to the elections, and their priorities change with it. Without non-profit organizations and, above all, field workers, help will be very difficult.

3.2 Summary

From our questionnaire survey and from the data provided to us by the organizations, it follows that the majority of Roma live in unsatisfactory conditions in socially excluded locations. Socially excluded localities began to arise artificially in our country after the Velvet Revolution after 1989, when Roma were evicted from lucrative places to the fringes of society. Privatization took place, people bought their apartments, and the Roma did not have the financial means to buy them, so they had to move out. Houses and apartments were bought by private individuals. The state sold the houses to private individuals, and the Roma moved into the houses, and the so-called poverty market began.

After 1989, there were approximately 400 socially excluded localities in the Czech Republic, currently there are over 600 of them. The owners demand high rents from the people when the state watches. In addition, the state subsidizes the owner by the fact that families, although they receive additional payments or contributions for housing and subsistence from the state, generally pay the entire amount to the private owner. However, he does not take care of the houses, does not repair them, and people only survive there. Many have already resigned. First, they also spoke to the media. Today they avoid the media. On the one hand, they are afraid that the owner will throw them out on the street, and on the other hand, they know that this will not solve their situation. Many politicians visited their homes before the elections, politicians gave people hope, but after the elections no one remembered them. Politicians suffer among themselves by politicians who own houses that are not in good condition and move Roma into them and demand disproportionate funding from them. It is the business card of the state and, above all, of each municipality, how it takes care of its citizens. After all, they are also their voters and, like the majority, they have the right to decent housing.

Sufficient tools are lacking to prevent trafficking in poverty. No inspections are carried out, officials do not find out in which inhumane conditions families with small children and individuals live, how the owners maintain the houses, how they collect the rent and in what amount. It is not controlled how the owners bill the rents and services based on the parameters. That the amount of rent does not depend on the amount of normative costs of the given municipality, but mostly on the number of people. To be able to live at all, the Roma sign at the office that the supplement or allowance for housing goes directly to the owner's account, so they cannot dispose of the money at all.

Already in 2013, our organization was the first to point out the inappropriate conditions of Roma living in hostels, the first to describe the conditions in which people live there, how much rent they pay, that the owners in one apartment unit easily require two rents, because they move into the apartment unit two families, she described the negative effect of living in such conditions on the whole family and above all on the children and their future. She was the first to comment that this was a trade in poverty. The organization published the document "Report on hostels in Ostrava or are hostels really a suitable solution for housing families with children and homeless people?" 10 years have passed since then and the situation of the Roma in terms of housing has not changed in any way. Society should realize that it is primarily the future generation that, if they continue to live in such undignified conditions, the children, like the parents, will resign and will not have a chance to live with dignity.

3.3 Recommendations

- The state should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of entities involved in the field of housing, define social housing, including the target group, and precisely determine the role of municipalities in this field.
- State interventions need to be set up in such a way that they are effective and interconnected.
- The demand and supply of rental housing and owner-occupied housing must be considered in relation to the corresponding supports.
- A prerequisite is the regular evaluation of the impact of the support provided.
- The state must effectively prevent the abuse of business in the field of hostel operation and apartment rental in relation to vulnerable groups of people or groups of people who are at risk of social exclusion and reduce the number of ghettos and excluded locations, which should contribute to the more successful integration of these people in the labour market. /Report on housing in the Czech Republic.

4 References

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Act No. 108/2006 Coll., Act on Social Services

Act No. 269/2021 Coll., Act on Identity Cards

5 List of abbreviations

CZ– Czech Republic

SEL – Socially excluded locality

Exchange rate 1 Euro - 23.62 CZK as of June 26, 2023