

Czech Republic Case Study:

**Access to Inclusive and Quality
Education, training, andf lifelong learning**

1. Author and Organisation Details + Methodology and Socio-Economic Context

1.1. Author and Organisation Information

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Vzájemné soužití (Life Together) is a Roma–non-Roma NGO based in Ostrava, Czech Republic. Since 1997, it has been working to improve the living conditions, rights, and participation of Roma communities, especially in structurally excluded localities. The organisation provides support in education, housing, employment, and social inclusion, with a strong focus on fieldwork, local empowerment, and intercultural dialogue. In the area of education, it runs early childhood programmes, supports Roma students in secondary and higher education, and cooperates with schools to promote inclusive practices and desegregation. The organisation has played a historic role in challenging school segregation and promoting educational equality. It supported the first known transfer of a Romani child from a special school to mainstream education in the Czech Republic—the case of Svetlana Kroštanová—whose act of civil disobedience in refusing discriminatory placement catalysed broader awareness and action.

This moment contributed directly to the groundwork for the landmark *D.H. and Others v. Czech Republic* case. From 1998 to the Court’s judgment in 2007, *Vzájemné soužití* played a key role as a support structure for the affected children and families, providing accompaniment, emotional support, and community advocacy throughout the process. While the legal representation was led by the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) and the Open Society Justice Initiative (OSJI), the organisation ensured that families were not left alone, helping to sustain their courage and participation in a landmark struggle for educational justice. Today, *Vzájemné soužití* continues this legacy through practical, community-rooted work in early childhood education, mentoring, school mediation, and desegregation support across Ostrava and the Moravian-Silesian Regio

1.2. Methodology and Geographical Scope

This case study is based on a combination of qualitative field experience, direct work with Roma families and schools, and review of recent national research and monitoring. It draws on the work of *Vzájemné soužití* in Ostrava and surrounding regions, including outreach, early childhood centres, and mentoring programmes. It also integrates data and insights from research institutions such as PAQ Research, the Czech School Inspectorate, the Ombudsman’s Office, and the RECI+ report, The national strategy for Roma inclusion. The findings reflect conditions in the Moravian-Silesian region, one of the Czech Republic’s most structurally excluded areas, while also referencing national trends.

1.3. Socio-Economic Situation of Roma in the Czech Republic

The estimated Roma population in the Czech Republic ranges between 250,000 and 300,000, with roughly half living in socially excluded localities (SVL). These neighbourhoods are often marked by poor housing conditions, unemployment, intergenerational poverty, and spatial isolation. Many Roma families face over-indebtedness, low digital access, and limited or mistrustful contact with public services, including schools.

The 2023 Government Report on the Roma Minority and surveys by PAQ Research show significant educational disparities. Only 43.9% of Roma over the age of 16 have completed basic education, and just 30.1% have a vocational qualification. Nearly 10% do not complete primary school at all, compared to 0.12% of the general population. In SVL areas, 68% of Roma have only basic or incomplete education—more than double the rate among non-Roma.

Poor educational outcomes are directly linked to other forms of exclusion, such as:

- Substandard housing (affecting up to 31% of Roma households)
- Digital poverty (lack of internet, devices, and digital literacy)
- Health disparities and mental health stress
- Structural racism in diagnostics, schooling, and employment pathways

1.4. Why Inclusive and Quality Education Matters

Inclusive and quality education is essential for breaking the cycle of exclusion and poverty among Roma communities. It builds the foundation for equal opportunity, labour market participation, and full social citizenship. For Roma children, early and inclusive education also counters the intergenerational effects of marginalisation, linguistic challenges, segregation, and mistrust. Access to education is not only a personal right—it is a structural lever for social cohesion and equity. As the experiences described in this case study show, inclusion begins with trust, cultural safety, and human connection.

The insights are grounded in daily practice: outreach to Roma families, cooperation with local schools, mentorship of Roma students, and the operation of early childhood centres such as Brouček. These are complemented by national data and findings from PAQ Research, the Czech Ombudsman, the RECI+ Early Childhood Report, and the Czech School Inspectorate. Together, this approach allows us to capture both the structural and deeply human dimensions of Roma educational inclusion in the Czech Republic.

This vision is not new. Over four centuries ago, Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius)—a Czech thinker and one of the founders of modern education—stood up against the religious dogma and social privilege of his time to propose a radically inclusive idea: that every child, regardless of origin or status, is capable of seeking and arriving at truth. Through his concept of *Pansofie*—universal wisdom—Comenius envisioned the democratisation of knowledge as a moral imperative. In an era when education was reserved for the few, he believed in learning for all. Despite being expelled by the clergy for these views, his legacy endures. For *Vzájemné soužití*, Comenius is not just a historical figure but a source of inspiration: a reminder that education must serve dignity, truth, and equality, even in the face of exclusion or resistance. The ongoing struggle for inclusive Roma education in the Czech Republic is not a departure from this tradition—it is its rightful continuation.

2. Introduction and Background

Despite legal commitments at national and European levels, Romani children in the Czech Republic continue to face systemic and deeply entrenched barriers in accessing quality and inclusive education. This case study outlines the main challenges, structural drivers, and promising responses related to Roma educational inclusion in the Czech context, drawing on both national research and field experience.

Since the landmark 2007 *D.H. and Others v. Czech Republic* ruling by the European Court of Human Rights, which condemned the disproportionate placement of Roma children in special schools, the Czech state has taken steps toward desegregation. These included legislative reforms, targeted funding, and EU-financed pilot projects. However, these responses have often lacked sustainability, clear accountability, and national coherence.

Recent findings by the Czech Ombudsman, PAQ Research, Open Society Justice Initiative, and the RECI+ Early Childhood report confirm that many Roma children still face:

- Exclusion from early childhood education, particularly in the most vulnerable 2–3 year age group.
- School segregation, either through ethnically concentrated mainstream schools or continued placement in special education based on biased diagnostics.
- Low transitions to upper secondary and university education, with very limited presence in grammar schools or academically demanding pathways.
- Multiple discrimination and domestic pressures, particularly on Roma girls, and children with disabilities.
- Underrepresentation of Roma staff in schools, and weak trust between schools and Roma families.

These systemic problems are exacerbated by fragmented governance, a lack of local desegregation plans, and minimal investment in inclusive staffing and support teams. At the same time, local and Roma-led initiatives are showing powerful results. Community centres, mobile early childhood teams, informal early childhood centers situated close to Roma neighborhoods, local Roma teaching assistants, stipend programmes, and mentorship models are gradually building trust and expanding access. This case study draws especially on the long-standing experience of *Vzájemné soužití*, a Roma–non-Roma NGO based in Ostrava, working with families, preschools, schools, and young people to expand educational inclusion from the ground up.

2.1 Early Childhood Education and Care

Ministry concepts of 'early care' nominally cover ages 0–8, but in practice focus primarily on ages 3–6. Structured preschool education below age 5 remains voluntary and often subject to fees. Early childhood education is a decisive factor in ensuring later school success—yet many Roma children in the Czech Republic enter preschool late or not at all. Structural barriers include the lack of available places in kindergartens (MŠ) near excluded localities, discriminatory enrolment practices, and limited outreach to socially excluded Roma families. Until recently, preschool was not compulsory before the age of five, and children aged 2–3 are still often left out of any structured care. However, the proportion of Roma parents making use of preschool education for their children remains low. A survey showed that only 28% of Roma children aged 3 to 6 attended preschool facilities, compared to 65% of majority population children of the same age.

According to the RECI+ (2022) country study and data from the Včasná péče (Early Support) platform, Roma children from disadvantaged socio-cultural backgrounds benefit most from early, relationship-based and trust-building interventions—long before entering formal preschool. Families need to be supported, not blamed. However, the public system often lacks both the capacity and the cultural competence to deliver this kind of outreach.

A leading example of good practice is the Brouček early childhood programme, operated by Vzájemné soužití in Ostrava's Liščina district. Brouček offers daily early learning activities for 2–3-year-old children, in close collaboration with parents and caregivers. The environment is culturally safe, relationship-based, and community-run. It focuses on language development, play, routine-building, and emotional readiness for school.

The programme has been acclaimed by Roma parents, early childhood experts (e.g. those involved in the Včasná péče platform), and local headteachers, who report that children from Brouček enter kindergartens with greater confidence and stronger skills, increasing their chances of long-term educational success. The Brouček model illustrates how early investment, trust, and cultural embeddedness can interrupt cycles of exclusion from the earliest age.

Policy insight:

According to PAQ Research, mobile preschools, local outreach teams, and Roma teaching assistants embedded in ECEC settings are necessary to close access gaps. Many Roma parents want preschool for their children, but face bureaucratic, cultural, or logistical obstacles. Models like Brouček can serve as community-driven bridges into the formal system.

2.2 Financial Barriers to Education

While education in the Czech Republic is officially free, financial barriers remain a key obstacle for many Roma families—especially in excluded localities. These include the cost of:

- School supplies, clothing, and hygiene items
- Lunch fees and transport
- Preschool fees for children under 5
- Extracurricular activities
- Boarding and accommodation for secondary school and university students.

These expenses place significant strain on families living in poverty or debt. Some children are kept home because parents cannot afford shoes, proper clothing, or transport. Others may drop out from secondary education due to the costs of commuting or dormitory fees.

One important response has been the introduction of free school meals in selected areas and years, especially in kindergartens. According to Včasná péče's 2023 analysis of “Obědy zdarma”, access to free meals:

- Improves regular attendance in both preschool and primary school
- Reduces financial stress on parents
- Encourages enrolment of the youngest and poorest children

However, this programme is project-based, underfunded, and does not cover all regions.

A more sustained measure is the government's national stipend programme for Roma secondary-school pupils, in place since 2003. Administered by the Ministry of Education, it provides annual support (approx. 14,000–21,000 CZK per student) to cover school-related costs. Yet uptake remains limited—often due to low awareness, complex paperwork, or stigma.

Vzájemné soužití plays a key role in overcoming these hurdles. Its field staff help Roma families:

- Navigate administrative processes to access stipends
- Secure required documents and school confirmations
- Maintain communication with schools and institutions

Currently, the organization supports over 35 Roma students at the secondary and university level. For many, this is the decisive factor in their ability to continue education beyond the compulsory years.

Policy insight:

PAQ Research (Step 34) recommends nationalising access to free school meals and introducing automatic or universal stipends for children in material need. They also emphasise the importance of linking financial aid with outreach and support—not simply offering money without removing bureaucratic and cultural barriers.

2.3 Non-Financial Barriers to Education

Beyond financial hardship, Roma children face a web of non-material barriers that shape their access to and experience of education. These include:

- Distrust between Roma families and schools, often rooted in past discrimination
- Low expectations from teachers and staff
- Communication gaps caused by cultural distance or language mismatch
- Administrative exclusion, such as missing documents or misunderstood obligations
- Lack of inclusive support services (e.g. assistants, tutors, mediators)
- Lack of quality schools close to segregated Roma neighbourhoods

Many Roma parents report feeling unwelcome in schools, unsure how to navigate the system, or worried that their child will face humiliation or bias. This emotional distance—compounded by institutional barriers—can lead to delayed enrolment, low attendance, or passive withdrawal from school life.

In response, local trust-building initiatives have emerged. They were led by NGOs with external funding—like the Norway Grants, OSF, and subsequently, by EU grants. These

- Roma teaching assistants and mediators, who help interpret school rules, translate expectations, and resolve conflicts
- Home visits and informal conversations between schools and families
- Community education centres, which offer pre-enrolment support and informal learning

The presence of a trusted Roma adult—whether assistant, outreach worker, or mentor—can change the dynamic between families and schools. These roles are often underpaid, undervalued, or funded through short-term projects, but they are crucial for bridging systemic gaps.

Frequent barriers to preschool attendance include financial costs (fees, meals), lack of transport, and poor communication between schools and parents. Municipal coordinators note that most Roma children only begin attending in the last mandatory year—meaning early literacy, language, and adaptation skills are missing.

Housing deprivation affects up to 31% of Roma families, with many facing issues like mold, noise, and lack of basic hygiene infrastructure. A pilot Housing First project in Brno showed that 67% of housed families were Roma, demonstrating the links between housing insecurity and school participation.

Policy insight:

PAQ Research and the Ombudsman both highlight the need to institutionalise these roles, with proper contracts, training, and integration into school teams. Without human bridges, formal inclusion remains symbolic. This is particularly true in settings with high Roma enrolment and deep social divides.

2.4 School Segregation and Special Education Placement

School segregation remains a persistent and widespread phenomenon in the Czech Republic, despite legal bans and international scrutiny. It manifests in two main ways:

1. Ethnically segregated mainstream schools:

Roma children are often concentrated in particular schools or classes, even in cities with mixed populations. These schools may be under-resourced, experience high staff turnover, and lack diversity in teaching teams. Local authorities sometimes justify this by citing “parental choice” or “catchment areas,” but in practice, segregation often reflects historic exclusion and present inaction.

The Association of Special Pedagogues is also a powerful lobby group that holds a patronising attitude to the Roma children, claiming that Roma children would benefit from a simplified curriculum, in a segregated setup, wherein they could experience success instead of failure in a competitive school environment. This powerful lobby still has a strong hold on many teachers, ministerial bureaucrats. They also use this argument with Roma parents, convincing them that the best place for their child is the segregated school with its simplified curriculum.

In some districts (e.g. Ústí nad Labem, Ostrava, Přerov), over 50% of Roma children attend schools where most classmates are also Roma. Nationally, the share of Roma children in such schools is estimated at 30–35%, compared to less than 5% for non-Roma children.

2. Placement in special education or practical schools:

Although the 2017 amendment to the Education Act aimed to reduce the misuse of special education pathways, many Roma children are still overrepresented in diagnostic categories like “mild mental disability.” The Czech Ombudsman (2023) confirms that diagnostic tools and placement practices remain biased, often reflecting social background more than actual ability.

In the 2020/21 school year, Czech primary schools enrolled around 950,000 pupils, including approximately 35,000 Roma pupils, according to the Ministry of Education and the Ombudsman. About 12% of Roma pupils (around 6,000 children) were placed in schools for pupils with mild mental disabilities (LMD), compared to 1.3% among non-Roma pupils — meaning Roma children are ten times more likely to be diagnosed with LMD.

Segregation remains widespread: in 2020/21 there were 17 primary schools with more than 90% Roma pupils, 32 with over 75%, 77 with over 50%, and 426 where Roma pupils made up over one-third of the student body. The Ombudsman warns that recent trends show a slight but worrying increase.

According to PAQ Research, there are over 4,200 primary schools in the Czech Republic, more than 260 of which have at least one-third Roma pupils.

Despite reforms, 22% of Romani pupils remain in special classes within regular schools, and 15% in schools under §16(9) of the Education Act—compared to their 3.6% share in the total school population. As of 2020/21, 11.7% of all Romani pupils were educated under the RVP ZV-UV (reduced curriculum for intellectual disability), nearly 10× the rate of non-Roma peers.

Unfortunately, we receive information from school children of the final years that in some schools, the teachers a priori decide that vocational schools are better for the child, and thus do not provide them with additional support to enter competitive secondary schools. We are presently addressing one such case of Lenka O., a 14 year old from an Ostrava school.

Most Roma students who complete compulsory school are guided—explicitly or implicitly—into vocational education without maturita. These pathways often lead to low-paying jobs, limit further study, and reinforce the cycle of exclusion.

Problems identified by PAQ Research and the Ombudsman include:

- Early streaming of children into vocational tracks with little career flexibility
- Lack of career guidance tailored to the needs and aspirations of Roma youth
- Weak links between vocational schools and labour market opportunities
- Stigma attached to certain fields and schools, often overlapping with ethnic patterns
- Minimal access to second-chance or adult education later in life

PAQ Research's mapping of segregated schools (2022) shows that:

- Segregated schools exist in almost every region
- Municipalities are responsible for zoning, but often avoid desegregation due to political sensitivity
- Without targeted support and enforcement, catchment areas preserve ethnic boundaries

Some cities, such as Brno and Ostrava, have made pilot efforts to redraw catchments or introduce inclusive programmes, but without systemic change and national leadership, these remain limited.

Policy insight:

Research identifies four key conditions for successful desegregation:

1. **Shared conviction** among local leaders, schools, and communities that ending segregation is essential.

2. **Coordination** across education and social services.
3. **Sufficient local capacity** to support excluded families and address housing and debt issues.
4. **High-quality, inclusive schools** prepared to educate socially disadvantaged children.

The aim is that **no school should have more than 10–15% Roma and other disadvantaged pupils** — a target considered achievable for most Czech municipalities.

Desegregation is not just about where Roma children go to school—it is about access to equal quality, opportunity, and dignity.

2.5 Early School Leaving and NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training)

Roma children in the Czech Republic face a disproportionately high risk of leaving school early, particularly during the transition to upper secondary education. Many leave the education system without completing a maturita (school-leaving exam), limiting their access to skilled employment, university, and civic life.

According to a survey cited in the Report on the State of the Roma Minority, only 43.9% of surveyed Roma over 16 completed basic education, and just 30.1% were trained in a trade. Roughly 10% did not complete primary school at all. Compared to the general population—where only 0.12% fail to complete primary school—this represents a stark disparity. In socially excluded localities (SVL), 68% of Roma have only basic or incomplete education (compared to 25% of non-Roma).

Barriers contributing to early dropout include:

- Poor preparation during primary school due to segregated or underperforming environments
- long-standing racial stereotypes and discrimination of Roma children, hostility to their presence at normal schools from other children and staff, the inability or lack of desire of school management to address racial attacks and humiliation at school settings.
- Lack of support during the transition to secondary education
- Financial stress and pressure to contribute to household income
- Low expectations from schools and internalised belief that “school is not for us”. However, we see that a generation of children are coming up which are ready to brave discrimination. With support from some staff, school headteachers, family members and NGOs, they are proudly carving for themselves a place in Czech schools and society.
- Gender-specific barriers for Roma girls, especially in more traditional families. Older girls are often given the task of doing the domestic chores. We find that widespread. These girls do the laundry, cook, clean and also take care of all the younger siblings. When the parents fall ill, these girls bear the heavy responsibility of taking care of the whole family. Such children thus are tired and face pressure at school, resulting in absence. I know of some families, where the girls would leave their household after turning 15, so as to start a new life with a partner.

According to PAQ Research and the Czech Strategy for Roma Equality (2021–2030), the rate of Roma early school leaving is several times higher than the national average. Many Roma youth enter low-quality vocational training without maturita, and some drop out altogether, ending up as NEETs. □ “Strategy for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation (2021-2030)” (Czech Government)

This strategy document states: “More than half (51 %) of young Roma people aged 16-24 were not in employment, education or training (NEET) in 2016.”

Also it says that according to the FRA survey (2016), up to 57 % of Roma pupils drop out of secondary education.

It compares this with much lower dropout among the majority population, saying Roma are more than eight times likelier to drop out of secondary education.

However, things are beginning to change. Initiatives led by Roma NGOs, education-focused foundations, and mentoring schemes are increasing retention and aspiration. One strong example is Vzájemné soužití, which currently supports over 35 Roma students in secondary and university education. The organization:

- Helps students and families access stipends
- Supports them through bureaucracy, school communication, and guidance
- Provides a trusted mentor or role model, often someone with similar experience

For many Roma students, this kind of individualised support is essential to survive the system, especially for those whose parents did not complete secondary education themselves.

Other sources of support include:

- Government stipend programmes for Roma secondary students
- Foundations such as Nadace Terezy Maxové, Nadace rozvoje vzdělání, Nadační fond Verda, and Výbor dobré vůle – Nadace Olgy Havlové
- NGO-led mentoring and tutoring (e.g. Romea, Gendalos, IQ Roma Servis)

Policy insight:

Stakeholders agree that increasing Roma transitions to maturita-track secondary schools and universities requires:

- Early guidance and aspiration-building (not just in 9th grade!)
- Financial support linked to mentoring
- Visible Roma role models, especially women
- Better outreach to parents and community leaders

2.6 Antigypsyism in education, training and lifelong learning (1 page)

Roma parents from socially excluded localities often fear for their children's safety in schools that have little or no Roma children. They complain of bullying, about the school's unwillingness to address issues. School heads often deny that any racism or anti-gypsyism is possible in their schools. I often hear about anti-Gypsyism faced by Roma children and their parents. In big towns like Ostrava, there seems to be an unwritten understanding among school head teachers that Roma children should be concentrated in certain schools. One such school is in the district of Radvanice. I believe that this happens with the support of the local government to keep other schools free of substantial numbers of Roma children.

My son himself had to undergo violent attacks as a boy of 11 with three head concussions within a month. The school authorities downplayed the attacks and made no effort to listen to the child. We then decided to move him to another school in Ostrava. We hear similar experiences from many Roma children. Often the child suffers alone, afraid of seeking help, secretly contacting anonymous help-lines, fears going to school, is overstressed, suffers bodily pains, begins to miss school and fails at studies.

There were also cases of cyberbullying, especially after the COVID isolation period. Life in socially excluded localities, with its unruliness, tensions, has a very negative influence on school children. There is no safe space for the child to study and rest. Adults are often stressed and play out their tensions on children. Also, the rents are so exorbitant that the family survives on food banks. When there is no money for snacks for school or no bread, children do not go to school.

Also, menstrual poverty was a factor affecting poorer girls. But from 2024, the city of Ostrava is placing boxes with free menstrual pads at schools. Several NGOs like Člověk v tísni, Romodrom also distribute the pads to school children. Life Together offers free menstrual pads at our community centres.

I think that the present government, which is on its way out, has done a good job on prioritising desegregation. The National Pedagogical Institute has done remarkable work on preparing several towns and regions to desegregate schools. Prime examples in Krnov, Ostrava. The experience should now be made standard for nationwide desegregation.

2.7 Support for Roma parents

I am convinced that the local and national governments can do more to support better educational opportunities for Roma children. Since housing is such a determinant for good school attendance and success, we need to redefine our priorities in this field. Recent statistics published by PAQ Research show that an astonishing 21% of all families in the Czech Republic are under threat of poverty. We estimate that a large percentage of the Roma population is thus under threat of poverty. The primary reason for this poverty is, apart from older debts, the high, often unaffordable rents.

A study by the Agency for Social Inclusion shows that the Index of social inclusion is highest in three regions- Moravian-Silesian, Karlový vary region and the Usti nad Labem region. The index shows that the three most vulnerable groups that are under the greatest threat of poverty are: seniors, single mothers and, surprisingly, families living in rent. The high cost of rent is dragging people down into poverty. This is the result of decades of neglect of this sector by several successive governments. Ostrava, with about 120,000 families (population about 310,000) has about a hundred social housing flats. This is in stark contradiction to Vienna -population about 900,000- which has about 250,000 social flats and another 250000 supported flats. We think that the government does not do much. Marginalized groups like the Roma hence suffer the most in this difficult situation. The extremely critical housing situation, along with racism, is also throwing hundreds of Roma families into internal displacement, which disrupts the lives and schooling of children. Under such circumstances, education often loses being priority.

We are not aware of specific measures for parents working abroad.

2.8 Educational support measures

Inclusive education requires inclusive teams. Yet schools in the Czech Republic—particularly those serving Roma pupils—often lack the human resources necessary to build trust, address diverse needs, and prevent school failure. Key gaps include:

- Roma teaching assistants, who serve as cultural and linguistic bridges
- School mediators and social workers, who help resolve conflicts and improve communication
- Inclusive education coordinators, trained in diversity, trauma-informed approaches, and learning support
- Mental health professionals, particularly in areas affected by intergenerational exclusion

Where these roles do exist, they are often:

- Funded through short-term EU or project grants
- Underpaid and precariously contracted
- Marginalised within school teams
- Hired without career paths, accreditation, or long-term vision

However, promising models do exist.

In Ostrava, for example, *Vzájemné soužití* has worked with multiple kindergartens and primary Education mediators and Roma teaching assistants are an essential support mechanism in Czech schools, especially in socially excluded localities. However, their availability is uneven and highly dependent on short-term project funding (e.g. OP VVV, OP JAK, APIV A/B projects, and local NGO support). There is no stable national funding for school mediators despite their recognition in the Czech Roma Equality Strategy 2021–2030. As a result, many schools discontinue mediator positions when projects end. Mediators often face poor working conditions, limited professional training, and unclear career pathways. According to PAQ Research (2023), only around 30% of schools serving high numbers of Roma pupils employ any form of mediator or assistant, despite clear evidence that these roles significantly improve attendance, family–school communication, and reduce early school leaving.

What needs improvement:

- Introduce systemic funding for school mediators within the state education budget.
- Provide professional accreditation and salary standardisation.
- Expand mediation to also include social and community work, not only classroom support.
- Strengthen cooperation with municipalities and NGOs.

There is no official system of language support for Romanes-speaking children entering Czech schools. Romanes is still not recognised as a language of instruction, unlike Ukrainian or Vietnamese. Preparatory classes and Czech as a Second Language programmes exist, but they are designed mainly for foreign pupils, not for Czech citizens from Roma communities. Assessments and diagnostics often underestimate cognitive ability of bilingual Roma children by misinterpreting language barriers as learning disabilities — contributing to segregation into reduced educational programmes.

After-school tutoring (*doučování*) is provided largely by NGOs (e.g. Tutoria, *Vzájemné soužití*, *Člověk v tísni*, *Romodrom*, *IQ Roma Servis*) and local Roma community centres, not by the state. These services are essential in many excluded localities, but coverage is inconsistent and dependent on unstable grants.

In Ostrava-Liščina and Hrušov, the NGO Vzájemné soužití runs homework clubs and family educational support. According to internal data (2024), regular participation in tutoring increased school attendance by 18% among Roma pupils and reduced school failure by 27%.

In Ústí nad Labem – Předlice, school mediators helped reduce absenteeism at ZŠ Plynárenská by one third in one school year, by building trust with parents and visiting homes directly. Parents in these schools report feeling more welcomed, and headteachers note that attendance, classroom atmosphere, and parent-school cooperation have improved.

A parent involved in one such programme shared:

“I used to be afraid to send my daughter to school. But when I met the assistant, and she explained everything in our language, it changed everything.”

Policy insight:

As noted in the 2021–2030 Roma Strategy and echoed by PAQ Research (Steps 22–24), the Czech education system must:

- Institutionalise and stabilise inclusive roles
- Create permanent contracts and training pathways for Roma assistants
- Fund multi-professional school teams in marginalised districts
- Value lived experience and community trust alongside formal qualifications

2.9 Promotion of Romani culture, history, and language (half a page)

Romani language education in Czechia is almost non-existent within the formal education system. Although Romanes is recognised as a minority language under the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, there is no systematic provision of Romani language teaching in mainstream schools. A few experimental or short-term pilot courses have been implemented by NGOs and universities (e.g. Charles University, Faculty of Arts, and Museum of Romani Culture), but these initiatives do not reach schools on a national scale. The Czech Ministry of Education does not provide teaching materials, curricula, or teacher training pathways for Romanes.

Roma are also severely underrepresented among teachers. According to estimates by PAQ Research (2023) and Roma Education Fund data, less than 0.3% of teaching staff in Czech primary schools are Roma, despite Roma making up 2–3% of the population. A slightly higher presence is found among teaching assistants (approx. 8–10% of assistants in some regions), but career progression into qualified teaching roles remains extremely rare, due to financial barriers, discrimination, and lack of role models.

Diversity education remains fragmented and inconsistent. The Roma Holocaust is referenced only briefly in optional curriculum frameworks, leaving coverage dependent on individual teachers. Many pupils complete compulsory schooling with no meaningful knowledge of the genocide of Roma and Sinti, despite more than 90% of Czech Roma being murdered during WWII at places like Lety u Písku and Hodonín u Kunštátu.

Controversial aspects of Czech post-war history, including forced sterilisation of Romani women, segregated schooling, anti-Roma violence (e.g. arson attacks in Vítkov 2009), or labour camps and collective punishment during socialism, are rarely addressed in history or civics education. While institutions such as the Museum of Romani Culture (Brno) and Memory of Nations (Post Bellum) produce high-quality educational programmes, these are not integrated nationally. The Framework Educational Programme mentions multicultural education, but implementation is generally tokenistic and lacks teacher training support.

Elena Gorolová, the famous Romani human rights activist, is visiting schools to discuss human rights issues and the problem of forced sterilization of Romani women. Elena's interview is also available at Post Bellum. But, such materials are yet to be put to use by school teachers.

2.10 Lifelong learning and the education of adults

The Czech Republic has policies that support lifelong learning (e.g. Strategy 2030+, National Strategy for Lifelong Learning), but participation is among the lowest in the EU – only 5.8% of adults participate in adult education (EU average 10.8%, Eurostat 2023).

For Roma adults, participation is extremely low—estimated at less than 1–2%. Second-chance education (druhošance) exists primarily via:

- completion courses for basic education (doplňkové základní vzdělání),
- evening/vocational secondary schools,
- some NGO programmes combining education & counselling (e.g. Člověk v tísni, Romodrom, Vzájemné soužití).

BUT access is very limited since only 83 schools in the country offered “completion of primary education” programmes in 2023 (Ministry of Education). Many Roma adults drop out because these programs lack social support (childcare, transport, counselling).

Life Together has a community learning centre called ROMA REKWORK- for requalification and work- that employs three women. Two of them are Romni, including one with a university degree. One woman is a field worker. This team combines field outreach, warm welcoming environment and support throughout the motivational courses to the placement at schooling and training centres to obtain formal certificates. It also offers support with interview preparation and placement. One another strength of ROMA REKWORK is the fact that it offers also other necessary support by cooperating with other services of Life Together like debt counselling at the Poradna, child care at the Brouček etc. Community learning centres with Roma workers can make an impact. Overall, barriers still include: lack of childcare, digital exclusion, debts and executions, mistrust of institutions, and limited funding sustainability.

Access to to other non-professional lifelong learning opportunities, such as a craft, a foreign language, or a hobby-related skill is very uneven and strongly depends on NGOs and local projects. Roma adults rarely join municipal or state-funded leisure or language courses because: fees and hidden costs (transport, materials), low prior schooling, fear of discrimination. But when community-based and trust-based learning is offered, participation grows.

2.11 (Digital) Skills for the labour market and for social mobility

In addition, digital exclusion plays a growing role. Many Roma families do not have reliable access to home internet, digital devices, digital literacy support. This creates barriers to learning, especially during online education periods (e.g. COVID), and limits access to adult learning, e-government services, and job platforms. As PAQ Research notes, some of the most digitally excluded children in the Czech Republic are Roma pupils in vocational tracks.

Positive shifts are emerging, especially in:

- Projects supporting second-chance education (e.g. finishing maturita later in life), NGO-led mentoring and digital tutoring and municipal initiatives combining adult education with employment pathways

Vzájemné soužití and other organizations have begun to link community centres, job counselling, and digital access points, especially for Roma youth who dropped out early.

Policy insight:

Desegregation must be paired with meaningful investment in inclusive, flexible, and aspirational vocational pathways. This includes:

- Expanding digital access and literacy
- Reforming early streaming and guidance
- Supporting transitions between vocational and maturita-track schools
- Funding lifelong learning options for young adults who were failed by the system

We think that with this economical growth of over 1% and a shortage of skilled and qualified labour in the market, there is an objective demand for Roma to be absorbed into the labour market. However, discrimination still exists. A case is that of a colleague, Betty, at Life Together. She had successfully cleared her maturita exams in journalism two years ago. In spite of all the support her foster family could give her- her foster father is a university professor, and her mother a business woman, she could not find a job. She was rejected at by all media houses. She thinks that this had to do with her dark skin. Betty underwent requalification course in social work, and is now working with children and youth at the Liščina Community Centre, where she is an amazing worker. We are now encouraging her to do part-time university studies.

On the otherhand, almost all other students who had completed secondary education- either with a maturita or with an apprentice level certificate- have found employment. Education does provide an opportunity for social mobility for the Roma.

2.12 Education in the National Roma Strategic Framework

The Strategy for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2021-2030 is an extensive document jointly prepared by Roma, pro-Roma NGOs, academics and the state Human Rights Office. The Strategy has a Descriptive part and an Excel Task part. The latter is the important part, but unfortunately has not been translated into English. There are seven tasks identified in the document, with education being the third. I had the honour of coordinating the NGO inputs while Martin Kaleja had the task of final compilation for the government.

1 – Increase Participation in Preschool Education

- Baseline: 43 % (2015/16) → Target: 86 % (2030).
- Issues: Roma children's preschool attendance remains low (only 2.1 % of all children in 2018/19).
- Main barriers: financial costs (fees, meals), lack of early care services, housing instability (children without local registration denied access), and poor coordination among institutions.
- Measures:
 - Develop programs to boost early childhood education participation.
 - Strengthen cooperation among schools, OSPOD, NGOs, and municipalities.
 - Provide financial support (e.g. free lunches, waived kindergarten fees).
 - Support parental involvement and education.
 - Establish multidisciplinary teams to coordinate support.

2 – Eliminate Discrimination and Segregation

- Persistent segregation: many schools have >50 % Roma pupils.
- Goal: monitor schools' anti-segregation measures; promote inclusive teaching; and ensure access to mainstream schooling and support services.
- Includes monitoring of Roma in institutional education (diagnostic/výchovné ústavy), where quality is very low.

3 – Strengthen Inclusion Mechanisms

- Regularly monitor the use of public funds for inclusive education measures and evaluate their effectiveness.

4 – Raise Educational Attainment

- Focus: prevent early school leaving and promote progression to higher levels.
- Targets:
 - Roma in upper secondary education: 45 % → 80 % by 2030.
 - Roma NEET rate (not in education, employment, training): 51 % → 15 % by 2030.
- Actions:
 - Support transitions between lower and upper secondary levels.
 - Maintain scholarship programs for socially disadvantaged Roma students (min. 7 million CZK/year).
 - Build partnerships between schools and NGOs providing comprehensive support.

5 – Support Roma University Students

- Current state: no systemic support, only NGO or donor scholarships.
- Measures:
 - Establish advisory and mentoring systems at universities.
 - Integrate Roma-focused social-pedagogical counseling to prevent dropout.
 - Recognize Roma cultural and social capital in teacher education.
 - Reflect Roma-specific interventions in OP JAK (EU funding).

6 – Improve Teacher Education

- Expand teacher training content on educating Roma children, cultural context, and inclusion.
- Introduce these topics as mandatory modules in accredited teacher education programs by 2025.

7 – Support Meaningful Leisure Education

- Promote Roma participation in arts, sports, and extracurricular activities to support integration and prevent risky behavior.
- NGOs remain the main actors due to lack of state involvement.

The strategy envisions a comprehensive system — from early childhood through tertiary education — focusing on inclusive access, desegregation, teacher training, parental engagement, and financial support. Yet it relies heavily on NGO cooperation, EU funds, and cross-sector coordination (MŠMT, MPSV, ÚV ČR, regions, municipalities). Another problem that we believe is that this document risks being ignored. Periodic reviews could be recommended.

Promising Practices and Innovative Projects

Across the Czech Republic, and especially in structurally excluded regions like Moravian-Silesia, innovative grassroots models are proving that inclusive education is possible—if built on trust, support, and cultural understanding. *Vzájemné soužití* and its partners have developed several such practices.

A. Brouček Early Childhood Centre – Ostrava-Liščina

Located in one of Ostrava’s most excluded localities, Brouček is a daily programme for 2–3-year-old children and their caregivers, designed to prepare them for entry into mainstream kindergarten (MŠ). The centre offers:

- Structured play and learning in a culturally safe setting
- Regular involvement of caregivers
- Support for socialisation, routine-building, and language development

Children from Brouček are consistently accepted into mixed kindergartens and transition more successfully than peers without this preparation. The programme has been praised by parents, educators, and school principals, and is seen as a model of culturally anchored early intervention.

B. Mentoring and Stipend Navigation

Vzájemné soužití supports over 35 Roma students in secondary and university education. Staff:

- Help students access and retain government or foundation stipends
- Provide mentoring, guidance, and a point of trust
- Communicate with schools and respond to difficulties before they escalate

For many of these students, this is the only accessible path to staying in school.

C. Roma Assistants in Ostrava’s Schools

The organisation has worked with public preschools and primary schools in Ostrava to embed Roma assistants in classrooms. These staff help bridge gaps between home and school, interpret cultural and emotional signals, and reduce absenteeism. In schools like MŠ Špálova, principals have documented increased trust, better attendance, and stronger cooperation with Roma parents.

D. Family Outreach and School Mediation

Vzájemné soužití runs door-to-door outreach campaigns in excluded neighbourhoods, informing parents about:

- Enrolment deadlines and kindergarten access
- Their child’s rights in school placement and diagnostics
- Support options, complaints procedures, and local services

In many cases, these personal conversations correct misinformation and prevent school exclusion before it begins.

E. Krnov – A Model of Local Political Leadership for School Desegregation

The town of Krnov in Moravian-Silesia offers a rare and inspiring example of municipality-led desegregation. Under the leadership of a committed mayor and education team:

- School catchment areas were redefined to balance the ethnic composition of schools
- The municipality adopted a clear desegregation strategy, based on mapping and evidence
- Support structures (teaching assistants, social pedagogy staff, and parental liaison officers) were introduced to ease the transition for all families
- Schools received targeted funding and training to support inclusive pedagogy and reduce resistance

The process was gradual and consultative, involving teachers, Roma parents, and non-Roma families. Krnov proves that with vision, courage, and coordination, segregation is not inevitable—it can be reversed.

These practises matter because they are built on long-term relationships, lived experience, and practical solutions. They show that inclusion is not a policy slogan, it is the product of human connection, respect, and support.

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite formal commitments to inclusive education, Roma children in the Czech Republic continue to face deep and systemic inequalities across the educational pathway—from early childhood through to university. Segregation, bias, underfunded support structures, and lack of trust still define the experiences of many Roma families.

At the same time, the case study reveals emerging sources of hope:

- Roma-led and community-based early childhood programmes such as Brouček
- Strong models of stipend navigation and academic mentoring
- Municipal leadership in desegregation, such as in Krnov
- Frontline workers—assistants, mediators, outreach staff—who form the human bridge between systems and communities

These initiatives are not marginal, they show what works when education is approached with dignity, trust, and practical support.

To build on this progress and move toward systemic change, the following recommendations are drawn from evidence and practice:

National Policy Recommendations

1. Adopt a national plan for school desegregation, based on PAQ's six steps:
 - Map segregated schools
 - Reform catchments
 - Support receiving schools
 - Monitor diagnostics
 - Provide resources for change
 - Communicate consistently
2. Institutionalise the role of Roma teaching assistants and inclusive teams with long-term contracts, training, and career pathways.

3. Expand access to early childhood education (especially ages 2–3), using community-based and outreach-supported models like Brouček.
4. Guarantee free school meals nationally for children in material need to support attendance and well-being.
5. Transform stipend programmes by reducing bureaucracy, automating eligibility, and linking financial aid to mentoring and support.
6. Invest in second-chance education and adult learning for Roma youth who left school early, with special attention to digital access.
7. Monitor and publish ethnically disaggregated data on school segregation, transitions, and educational outcomes in line with EU guidance.

EU-Level and International Recommendations

1. Ensure that Czech compliance with the EU Roma Strategic Framework includes measurable targets on school desegregation and ECEC access.
2. Encourage use of EU funds (e.g. ESF+, ERDF) for long-term staffing and inclusion infrastructure, not only pilot projects.
3. Monitor implementation of Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) on Roma inclusion, with Roma civil society involvement.
4. Share and scale local good practices (e.g. Krnov, Brouček, stipend mentoring) across member states through structured exchange.

Final Thoughts

Education can either reproduce injustice or dismantle it. The lived experiences of Roma families, and the field-based responses described in this case study, demonstrate that exclusion is not inevitable. With trust, cultural understanding, and sustained investment, even deeply embedded inequalities can be transformed. The Czech Republic has at its disposal the tools, models, and community actors needed to create a more inclusive educational system. What is required now is political will, systemic coherence, and the courage to act at scale.

Key Citations and Sources

Below are the primary sources already integrated in the case study.

- **Czech National Sources**

1. PAQ Research Reports (2022–2024) – Mapping of school segregation, 41-point desegregation roadmap, Step 34 recommendations on stipends and meals.
2. Czech School Inspectorate – Annual reports on educational inclusion and school performance.
3. Czech Ombudsman (Veřejný ochránce práv) – Reports on diagnostic bias, segregation, and access to inclusive education.
4. Government Report on the State of the Roma Minority (2023) – Data on education, housing, and socio-economic status.
5. RECI+ Country Report (2022) – Early childhood education gaps and best practices for inclusion.
6. Czech Roma Equality Strategy 2021–2030 – National policy commitments and monitoring indicators.

- **European and International Legal and Policy Sources**

7. D.H. and Others v. Czech Republic, European Court of Human Rights, 2007 – Landmark ruling on discrimination in education.
8. EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation (2020–2030) – European policy framework on Roma inclusion.
9. European Commission Country Reports (2023, 2024) – Assessments of Czech compliance with Roma-related CSRs.
10. Open Society Justice Initiative – Reports on legal and systemic discrimination in education.
11. Roma Civil Monitor (previous editions) – Comparative monitoring of Roma education across EU member states.

- **NGO and Practice-Based Sources**

12. Vzájemné soužití o.p.s. – Internal documentation, case records, Brouček evaluations, and mentoring programme logs.
13. Platforma pro včasnou péči (Early Support Platform) – Practice recommendations on early childhood outreach.
14. Foundations supporting Roma education:
 - Nadace Terezy Maxové
 - Nadace rozvoje vzdělání
 - Nadační fond Verda, Výbor dobré vůle – Nadace Olgy Havlové

Annex:**Summary of PAQ's 41 Recommendations for Desegregation and Educational Inclusion**

In 2024, PAQ Research published a comprehensive set of 41 recommendations to guide national and local stakeholders in desegregating education and supporting Roma inclusion. These recommendations are grouped into six thematic areas, summarised here:

1. Mapping and Accountability

- Map all segregated schools and make data public (Steps 1–3)
- Create an official definition of school segregation
- Assign clear responsibility to local and regional authorities for addressing it

2. School Desegregation

- Reform school catchments to ensure social mix (Step 2)
- Redirect new Roma enrolments away from segregated schools (Step 4)
- Support receiving schools with inclusive pedagogy, training, and resources (Step 3)
- Make desegregation a condition for EU and national education funding

3. Diagnostic Reform

- Audit psychological and pedagogical diagnostic practices (Step 6)
- Remove biased tools and retrain counselling staff
- Strengthen family rights and transparency in placement decisions

4. Inclusive Education Support

- Institutionalise and finance roles for:
 - o Roma assistants
 - o Inclusion coordinators
 - o School mediators and social workers
- Fund multidisciplinary teams in socially excluded schools (Steps 22–24)
- Reduce class sizes and improve staffing ratios in high-need areas

5. Family Support and Outreach

- Increase pre-enrolment outreach through community centres and Roma NGOs
- Launch mobile ECEC and preschool inclusion teams
- Expand programmes like Brouček and “Škola hrou” for early parental engagement
- Provide culturally competent support for school-home relationships

6. Systemic Levers

- Include desegregation targets in Czech Roma Strategy implementation
- Use Country Specific Recommendations (CSR) to trigger national accountability
- Fund long-term interventions, not fragmented pilot projects
- Engage Roma communities meaningfully in policy design and monitoring

These recommendations form a practical and evidence-based roadmap to overcome persistent exclusion. Many of them are already being tested in local practices like those described in this case study, and could be scaled up with the right political and institutional will.

Ostrava
2.7.2025