



*KHETAUN (TOGETHER): With Key Steps to Inclusion of
Romani Children into Quality Early Childhood Programs*

Recommendations for policy makers at the level of individual country of partner organization in the field of inclusion of Romani children into preschool programs

Czech Republic





Introduction

Many studies have found that development of cognitive functions, motor skills, speech and thinking of children up to the age of five is significantly influenced by outside stimuli, meaning the educational influence of adults, who take care of them. Therefore, this early childhood period before the start of primary education is crucially important for all future development in the area of child's personality and it even influences child's future success rate in education and in the job market (see http://jenni.uchicago.edu/Invest/FILES/dugger_2004-12-02_dvm.pdf; http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/3998/1/3998_DFE-RR142.pdf ; <http://www.issa.nl/content/studies-reports-books>).

In order to succeed in the educational system, one needs a specific type of didactic stimulation, which is not a natural and essential part of basic care of child's safety and healthy development. If a family is experiencing a long-term lack of competitive ability in the job market due to low level of education, it is very likely that this type of didactic stimulus will be missing in their child's upbringing. An adult in the role of a parent will only adopt this kind of stimulus, when he has achieved a level of education, which allows him to find adequate employment in the job market. Therefore, families with low social-economic status are more threatened by failure in the education system.

In the Czech Republic, research into education of socially disadvantaged children or children of different cultural background in the preschool age is limited, mostly by location or timespan (such as research of Czech Agency GAC or the UN, UNICED of REF). This data is then not systematically analyzed within the Czech educational system. Moreover, this data is problematic, because there is no one way of recognizing "social disadvantage" and these children usually don't even get access to the necessary support measures. Level of attendance of children from disadvantaged background in preschool institutions is also not monitored (not even on the local level). Even the data collected by individual schools or counseling services is not suitable for a general analysis.

According to an inquiry by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), Czech Republic has one of the lowest attendance of Romani children in preschool education across the EU (less than 30% of Romani children attend primary school). Moreover, this inquiry also revealed that the Czech Republic dedicates significantly less money to early childcare services for families and children in need than other EU states. Less than 10% of children aged 0-3 receive some form of support, which is less than the goals of the Barcelona objective (which is 33%). Czech Republic falls behind other EU states even in the level of attendance of children aged 3-6 in preschool institutions (Integrating Romani preschoolers, OSF/UNICEF/REF, 2015. chapter 3.1.4.). Therefore, the level of support is not sufficient and as a result, Romani children attend preschool education less than in other EU states. At the same time, the number of socially excluded areas has tripled in the past ten years (according to the research by GAC agency) and thus, the number of children in need has increased as well. At the same time, Czech government has approved a Strategy for Education Policy until 2020, which states that: "especially in the case of children from socially disadvantaged environment, qualified upbringing and education from an early age has a great potential to eliminate some of the disadvantages and increase the chances of successful education career. Therefore,





it is necessary to systematically address childcare and early education in the next time period, which will require cooperation among different departments (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2014).

There are two state actors in the Czech Republic, who should systematically focus on improving the situation of either Romani or socially disadvantaged families: The Government Council for Roma Minority Affairs and The Agency for Social Inclusion. The Council should oversee cooperation of different departments, recommend and present information, proposals and strategies to the government, give out statement for government's decisions, recommend subsidy priorities and recommend areas of work for The Agency. The Council does not have executive or legislative power. It regularly prepares the Report on the Situation of Roma Communities and approves short and long-term "Roma Integration Strategies". The Agency mostly focuses on cooperation with specific towns, where it helps to create and implement integration plans and strategies bases on analysis of the area. It regularly publishes "Strategy to Fight Social Exclusion" and "Action Plans for Fighting Social Exclusion". It has also published "Housing Concept in the Czech Republic until the year 2020", "Concept for Employment Politics in the years 2014-2020" and "National Action Plan for Inclusive Education", which was approved by the government, but never implemented. Besides these two actors, there is also the Government's Commissioner for Human Rights. However, it is the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports who has the legal responsibility for the overall situation, concept and development of educational institutions and who also prepares the national education program and evaluates the educational system in a report on the state and development of the educational system (Law n. 561/2004). Regional offices also prepare long-term concepts for education and development of educational system once in every four years and present it to the ministry for assessment and comments.

We can therefore conclude that they are short and long-term plans, strategies, concepts and methodologies on how to improve the situation of children from socially disadvantaged families in the educational system. What is missing is a synergy of various departments and a unified concept, which would provide support both on state and local level and a suitable long-term approach to improving the situation of children from socially disadvantaged or excluded families. The main difficulty lies in the lack of clear allocation of responsibility for the quality of education and only vaguely defined goals and objectives. Former director of the Agency for Social Inclusion Martin Šimáček assessed the situation like this: "It is often difficult to navigate oneself in a labyrinth of different strategies, which are not being implemented or respected and which fail to have any effect in the end" ... "It is important to note that various government agencies often lack the necessary influence, don't have the respect of the cabinet members and often don't have any real power to influence the legislative process." (Šimáček, Martin: How to develop Effective and Inclusive Policies, Centre for European Neighborhood Studies, 2016

<https://publications.ceu.edu/sites/default/files/publications/fod-simacek.pdf>).

Political will of elected representatives is then greatly affected by the short election cycle, which is not compatible with the need for long-term concepts and long payback period of investments. Therefore, there is still a lack of necessary funding for the majority of measures, which would be difficult to swallow for the majority of voters. "Stressing the rights and interests of all children on all levels of social policies (mainstreaming) is one of the weak points due to both horizontal and vertical fragmentation of politics.



Although there is a variety of actors on all levels of state administration and elsewhere, their cooperation is limited” (Sirovátka, Tomáš: Investing in children: Ending the vicious cycle of disadvantage, 2014). On the state level, we can mention the problem with insufficient capacity of social and counseling services and normative system of financing based on the number of children per class. On the local level, the parties often lack interest to take their share of responsibility for long-term and quality educational policies.

In this series of recommendations, we will present a wide variety of useful measures. On top of that, we separated a few most specific and realistic measures in each of the categories. We designed the other measures using complex approach and stressing synergy of all actors.

I. The importance of preschool education and ensuring social justice in education

Analysis of the situation:

Czech education system is characterized by massive decentralization of educational system management, which gradually increased in the past 20 years and which has left the main state administration bodies with almost no control over the quality and accessibility of education on the local level. During the Communist era, the education system was highly centralized and unified in both content and ideology. After the year 1989, the system was gradually decentralized both in the focus of the curricula and the system of management. At first, the management was directed at the level of former districts, then in the year 2000, some of the competencies were taken over by the regional authorities and some by the local municipalities. This level of decentralization is unique even when compared to other countries.

There is even a lack of delegation of responsibility for the quality of education in the law. The Ministry is the only actor, whose role is clearly defined: it is responsible for state administration's tasks in the school system. Municipal authorities, on the other hand, are only obliged to “ensure the conditions for fulfillment of compulsory education, but the responsibility for the management and direction of education is not enforceable on the local level. Moreover, there are no tools for monitoring, if this kind of responsibility is being carried out” (SPIV ČR, Felcmanová L. et al.: Possibilities for System Solution of Methodical Management and Providing Support for Pupils, p. 66). All in all, responsibility is divided very vaguely by the law. Relevant regulations only declare, that the regional and municipal authorities have to make sure that educational development is in agreement with “the interests of the citizens, job market needs, demographical development and development of the local area” (SPIV ČR, p. 67).

Apart from that, the capacity of the system of counseling and social services is insufficient. Research into the system of counseling services, which was published as a part of a



project entitled Systemic Support of Inclusive Education (SPIV), has shown that “the overall majority of facilities (82%) report some or complete staffing shortage. 93% of School Counseling Services report a lack of special pedagogues and some a lack of psychologists too. Special Pedagogical Centres would like to see the number of specialist jobs increased by up to 80% and Pedagogical-Psychological Counseling Centres would like to it increase by 30%” (SPIV, Analysis of Support Measures for Pupils with Special Educational Needs – School Counseling Services, p. 49). Therefore, the basic conditions for an inclusive approach in education are not being met due to insufficient capacity of these services.

As a consequence, local authorities often fail to perceive watching over quality and equal access to education as their responsibility. Not only is there a lack of long-term planning due to short election cycles, but there is even a lack of interest, willingness to act and erudition, because smaller municipalities don't have any specialists in the field of education. The majority of municipalities are thus not capable of quality assessment and limit their role to formal monitoring of the budget and approving the appointment of headmasters.

In the majority of international studies, Czech educational system is described by these characteristics:

- High degree of stratification due to the existence of eight year gymnasiums (starting at the age of eleven), high number of segregated classes or schools (former Practical Schools with limited curricula extent)
- Low attendance in preschool education
- Frequent deferrals of the first year of primary education without sufficient support and frequent repetition of a year of education, even in the first grade of primary school
- Lately also lowering of performance quality in the ISSA and PISA comparisons

Recently, there have been some major changes with the School Law amendment, which came into effect in September 2017. One of them is a change in the basic principle support allocation. Now, a child can be assigned with specific support measures without the need to fit into one of the three categories of support (social disadvantage, medical disadvantage, disability), as was the case in the past. These support measures must be prescribed by one of the counseling services office and the school is then allocated with the necessary finances. Under the new law, a child is also obliged to undergo one year of pre-school education before entering school. Preschool enrollment is obligatory for all children aged 5 (or turning 5 by August of the current year), who are not yet frequenting a preschool institution. Finally, an attachment to the Framework Education Programme, which dealt with education for pupils with mild mental disability, was abolished. Schools that educate these pupils must comply with the new version of the Framework Education Programme for Primary Education by the 1st of September 2018. What that means is that pupils with mild mental disability will have a more similar schedule to other pupils and won't be forced to change classes.

On the basis of this brief analysis, we would like to recommend the following steps for ensuring equality and quality in education:

1. Local Level

1.1. Municipalities are founders of preschools and do not have the possibility to establish education department

1.1.1. More development: The founder of a preschool (local authority), in cooperation with education experts and representatives of the interested target groups, creates a vision of development of local education with one of the aims being provision of access for all children living in the local area to quality preschool education, including children at risk of social, economic or cultural exclusion. The local authority should take steps to ensure that a local preschool develops strategy which is in line with its vision.

1.1.2. Following the reports of the Czech School Inspection: The local authority scrutinizes the Czech School Inspection's reports and supervises adoption of recommendations aiming at improving quality of education.

1.2. Municipalities with extended powers, district towns and regional cities

1.2.1. Education Development Concept: The local, district or regional authority has already a long-term local education strategy with clearly identified, specific and achievable goals, that can be evaluated and that include provision of quality preschool education for children from families at risk of social, economic or cultural exclusion. The local authority supervises individual school strategies so that they are in line with the long-term strategy.

1.2.2. Founding Education Departments: Education department is founded in the municipality and experienced clerks or people experienced in school management or in vocational education and training are employed.

1.2.3. Quality and Justice Monitoring: The municipality continuously monitors quality, justice and equality of opportunities in education provided in the municipality run schools through use of appropriate and relevant evaluation tools (for ex. by using tools from the project „A Way to Quality“ realized by the National Institute for Vocational Education), or through cooperation with experts in the field. It adopts measures aiming at improving situation in the field based on these results.

1.2.4. Catchment Areas Coordination: Appropriately adjusts and regulates catchment areas for schools in the area in



cooperation with preschool and primary school directors and while keeping in mind assessment of relevant data.

- 1.2.5. Implementing “inclusion”:** It monitors implementation of legislation concerning support measures for pupils with special education needs (if special education needs are identified early, if specific supportive arrangements are included in the school counseling centres' recommendations for these children, if there are high quality individual plans and plans for pedagogical support and if they are fulfilled etc.). When needed, it ensures continual professional training for teachers from relevant schools.
- 1.2.6. Capacity Building:** It ensures sufficient capacity of preschools based on the needs of a local area – it coordinates availability of local preparatory classes and preschools in relation to relevant registration areas and availability of primary schools and their specialization.
- 1.2.7. Supporting Pupils with Postponement and Support with Obligatory Preschool Education:** It ensures that the children with postponement of school attendance get support through systematic and regular stimulation of deficit areas that caused the postponement. Activities developing weak functions are provided by the preschool staff or teachers in preparatory classes . The local authority supervises the quality of the support provided.
- 1.2.8. Demography and Planning:** It evaluates demographic data in order to plan local education system development (in case of municipalities with extended powers in the whole administration area).
- 1.2.9. Preparatory Classes are not in Special Schools:** It does not found preparatory classes in schools established on the basis of the § 16, article 9 of the School law (before known as autonomously run schools for handicapped children).

2. State Level

- 2.1.1. Analyse the ways to implement systemic assessment of maturity for school year and a half before the start of primary school, so that obligatory preschool education free of fees could be prescribed, if needed.**
- 2.1.2. Ensure that administrative tasks fit in the job description of preschool employees.**



- 2.1.3. Relax hygiene norms which reduce the number of facilities for children:** The obligation to accept children from four and gradually from three and two years old (by 2020) will lead to lack of preschool capacity, especially in bigger towns. In order to increase preschool capacities, relaxing norms limiting facilities working with children would be a significant help.
- 2.1.4. Child Protection Services:** Increase capacity of Child Protection Services, so that field workers can focus on prevention and there is enough capacity for services for preschools. Provide methodical guidance for preventive field work and cooperation with preschools (ensuring continuity of field work in specific areas).
- 2.1.5. Methods to identify disadvantaged children:** Methodical guidance by Child Protection Services with regards to identification of disadvantaged children in primary or early stage of care.
- 2.1.6. Counseling services capacity:** Increase capacity of School Counseling Centres and support systemic and effective methodical guidance by the National Institute for Education or the National Institute for Vocational Education with regards to socially disadvantaged children (support implementation of the School Law in preschools).
- 2.1.7. Financial support to those in material distress:** Encourage and motivate regional authorities to take part in a project of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, through which all children in material distress could get access to complete nourishment. Promote the options of subsidising meal allowances/ preschool fees through other means (charitable foundations, NGOs etc.).
- 2.1.8. Policies based on data analysis:** Introduce a unified record keeping system for preschools, primary schools and school counseling centres. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports should effectively analyse this data, in collaboration with Czech Statistical Office, other ministries, other public service providers, Czech School Inspection and other relevant actors. Public service provision should also be assessed accordingly.
- 2.1.9. Employment Office – material support for activities:** Provide the Employment Office with clear instructions on how to support children in material distress. Popular activities are often unreachable by disadvantaged families, which stigmatize and disqualified them from the mainstream society.

2.1.10. Financial Motivation for Teachers: It provides financial incentives and thus motivates highly qualified teachers and assistants for work in preschools and primary schools in socially and economically disadvantaged areas.

II. Building trust and connecting preschools with different actors within the local community

Analysis of the situation

Connecting, networking and communication on any level is the basis of complex support approach and support. Cooperation and continuity is needed on all levels, from the state to the local level. Complex approach is especially important when dealing with social exclusion, which is a multi-dimensional problem affecting all aspects of life. In order to achieve this approach, we need cooperation already at the level of the ministries, and continuity of legal actions, concepts and financing. As was stated in the previous chapter, the policies of various departments are not fully unified and supportive of each other. As an example, we can state the concept of early care, which falls within the authority of the ministry of health, and is therefore defined only for children with disability. Martin Šimáček stated: “In the Czech Republic, there are many governmental, regional and local strategies, but they don't have any real effect on the situation and instead of improving it, they rather conserve it.” The fact that there is still a lack of data collection and analysis (including missing basic parameters for data collection and evaluation) is telling. “The available experience and expertise is not systematically used while policies are designed: Political goals are for the most part more important than evidence-based approach.” (Sirovátka; Investing in Children).

In the system recommendations, we have focused more on the local level, where it is easier to specify concrete steps to lower the risk of social exclusion. Mutual cooperation and unified approach by all actors in a local area is fittingly described as “networking” in a publication by the Social Integration Programmes entitled System Connections (Šotola J. et al., 2013). According to this publication, the process of networking can be described in three phases: 1) Describing the situation while involving all actors; 2) Discussing possible solutions; 3) Reaching concrete results. Efficiency of these phases then surely depends on involvement of all parties. Our recommendations relate to the local governments, because only that can bring a systemic and specific change. If this responsibility falls on other subjects (such as NGOs), that is not a systematic approach by the



government. As for the local level, it is necessary to specify between smaller towns and municipalities with extended powers, which have access to more experts and more departments.

1. Local level

1.1. Municipalities are founders of preschools and do not have the possibility to establish education department

- 1.1.1. Ensure that the responsible person attends necessary meetings coordinated by the bigger municipality** (points 2.2.1. and 2.2.2.) and ensure that communication between preschool, counseling services and social services runs smoothly.
- 1.1.2. Prevent law circumvention with relation to the obligatory preschool year with cooperation with the preschool director.** The municipality supports preschool director, so that he/she regulates providing permissions for excuse from obligatory preschool education and supports cooperation between the preschool and the Child Protection Agency.

1.2. Municipalities with extended powers, district towns and regional cities

- 1.2.1. Group coordination:** The municipality coordinates a working group composed of relevant departments' officials (school department and social department), directors, preschool and primary teachers, school counseling centres representatives (pedagogical–psychological counseling centres, pedagogical centres for pupils with special needs), paediatricians, NGOs working in education and social services, parents representatives. This group meets regularly and discusses current local education issues and challenges with the aim of finding solutions for them.
- 1.2.2. Sharing information among departments and schools:** The municipality defines a functional way of communication in the field of social and legal protection of children between school department and social department; and between these departments and the schools that fall under their authority.
- 1.2.3. Group of preschool and primary school directors:** It organizes regular meetings of directors from preschools and primary schools that fall under its



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authority (in case there are private subjects in the local area) with the aim to share information and best practices, to provide information on continual professional development and methodical guidance in the field of high quality preschool education and support of transition of children from preschools to primary schools.

- 1.2.4. **Case Conferences:** The municipality organizes conferences concerning specific case studies of children and pupils.
- 1.2.5. **Prevent law circumvention with relation to the obligatory preschool year with cooperation with the preschool director:** The municipality supports preschool director, so that he/she regulates providing permissions for excuse from obligatory preschool education and supports cooperation between the preschool and the Child Protection Agency.
- 1.2.6. **Field screening:** Through social worker networks (field workers and social-activization services) it searches for preschool age children that are at risk of school failure and creates opportunities for their long-term preschool attendance (from the age of 3 years, if possible) or another form of organized preschool education.

2. State level

We believe that due to the aim of this chapter being „ building trust and connecting preschool with different actors within the local community”, it is not possible to provide recommendations for the state level. Communication and trust between preschools and local communities cannot be prescribed or instigated by nationwide measures.



III. Activities for children who are not enrolled in preschools and their parents

Analysis of the situation:

Many studies have shown that the efficiency of an intervention significantly increases the earlier one starts working with a child from a socially disadvantaged family. In chapter 1, we have already described the new amendment, under which a child is obliged to undergo one compulsory year of preschool education before starting primary school. If socially disadvantaged children actually underwent this obligatory year in a proper manner, it could be considered as an improvement of the situation.

Nevertheless, feasibility studies made by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, which explored the Efficiency of the obligatory preschool year on the basis of quality data analysis, still show a few difficulties (Feasibility Study, Here and Now Company, Demographic Information Centre, 2015). Firstly, the studies show that it is not a cost-effective measure with regards to other models ensuring preschool education for socially disadvantaged children. Moreover, the studies mention a great risk of misusing the individual education plans and a risk of circumvention of this regulation by continual excusing of children, for which there is no unified direction and by which all families will be affected. Therefore, the studies point out that it is very likely that this law will primarily limit the rights of families that are not socially disadvantaged and will not lead to targeted support of the families that are. Another disadvantage lies in the fact that one year of preschool education is not sufficient for disadvantaged children. Besides that, the need for quality pedagogical approach is not considered and without it, the measure will not be fully functional. Moreover, the processes for cooperation between preschools and social departments is not sufficiently defined and much needed capacity building in both preschool institutions and social departments is also not considered.

Therefore, it is quite likely that even children aged five or six from socially disadvantaged families still won't attend any primary education. The only solution for this problem would be to have a systematic and realistic concept prepared by the state prescribing primary care (0-3 years) and early care (3-6) with regards to social disadvantage. In the Czech Republic, there are no



laws prescribing educational activities for disadvantaged children up to the age of three by the Ministry of Education or Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The term “primary care” is primarily tied to providing specialized care for children with disability under the law n. 108/2006 on social services. “Primary care is a type of field work, possibly accompanied by outpatient treatment, provided for a child up to the age of seven and his/her parents. This service is provided for a child with disability or if a child's development is threatened by unfavourable health state. The service focuses on providing support to the family and supporting child's development taking into account his/her specific needs.” (Law n. 108/2006, article 54 (1)). However, existing needs are still not covered by these services, because they are mostly provided by nongovernmental organizations (Early Care Society).

Similar situation prevails also for the early care period (3 to 6 years). The definition of early care by law n. 108/2006 on social services does not include support for socially disadvantaged children. Therefore, those who provide early care are limited in their options for state financing for socially disadvantaged families. Early care is not embedded in the School Law and the term itself can only be found in concept documents describing it as intervention programmes aimed at development of socially disadvantaged children aged 3-6.

In 2008, Czech government passed Early Care Policy for Children from Socially and Culturally Disadvantaged Environment in the Area of Education for the years 2005-2007, including its update Action Plan Proposal for Implementing Early Care Policy for Socially Disadvantaged Children. However, neither the Policy nor the Action Plan is being implemented. This is another example of failure of cooperation between departments, which leads to strategies not being implemented or respected. (This topic is further covered in a publication *Inclusion of Romani Preschool Children*, OSF /REF/ UNICEF, 2015.)

Social Integration Programmes, which are a part of People in Need, provide services across the Czech Republic, which could be seen as examples of good practice for early care, if they were provided systematically through state field work. As an example, we provide a brief description of the services provided by the Social Integration Programmes:

“In our preschool club, we mostly educate children, who would probably otherwise not get any form of preschool education and who would be in danger of school failure in the future. The main goals are providing educational services similar to the ones in preschools and at the same time, offer strengthened individual support in a small group. On top of that, our preschool clubs try to serve as





an intermediate step before enrollment in a regular preschool and primary school, so that a child is provided with the amount of care necessary for him to be able to go to a regular preschool. The workers focus on individual and group activities that reduce the disadvantages caused by the child's environment. Strengthening skills and continuous work by the preschool worker also contributes to the child's ability to join mainstream education and limits early school failure. In our individual work, we tend to focus on the skills that were for various reasons not developed by the child – sometimes due to lack of interest by the parents, sometimes due to barriers at the side of the educational system, sometimes due to financial reasons. Huge advantage of the clubs is their overlap into social work and the family life of a child, accessibility of the service and the possibility to work with the family environment in a complex manner. Another thing that has turned out to be a useful tool in the past two years is cooperation with preschools and so called “adaptation stays”, in which the children from our preschool clubs regularly attend sessions at a regular preschool, where they meet the other children and are educated jointly” (Martina Francuchová, Social Integration Programmes).

1. Local level

- 1.1.1. Local authority coordinates work of all interested stakeholders (representatives of a preschool, primary school, departments of social and legal protection of children, school counseling centres, paediatricians, NGOs acting in education and social services, parents representatives) stressing preventive work by the Child Protection Agency.
- 1.1.2. Limiting repetitive continual excusing of children enrolled in the obligatory preschool year in cooperation with the Child Protection Agency and preschool directors.
- 1.1.3. Through social worker networks (field workers and social-activation services) it searches for preschool age children that are at risk of school failure and creates opportunities for their long-term preschool attendance (from the age of 3 years, if possible) or another form of organized preschool education. (point 2.2.6.)
- 1.1.4. Municipality provides primary and early care in socially excluded areas and supports the work of NGOs and charitable organizations.

1.2. State level





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- 1.2.1. Ensuring the functionality of the National Group for Preschool Education and Early Care, so that it has enough power, finances and authority to recommend measures on national, regional and institutional policies and practice.
- 1.2.2. Implement measures stated in the Early Care Policy through the National Group for Preschool Education and Early Care founded by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports.
- 1.2.3. Ensure cooperation of all relevant ministries and educational institutions with regards to primary and early care policies.
- 1.2.4. Expanding the concept of early care in the law n. 108/2006 on social services to include socially disadvantaged children.
- 1.2.5. Expanding services by early care providers, so that reproduction of social exclusion can be prevented.



IV. Programs for empowering Romani families with regard to childcare and encouraging child development

Analysis of the situation

In the previous chapter, we have explored ways to systematically address the issue of children not attending preschools. As far as systematic nationwide ways of strengthening parental childcare competencies, we can refer mainly to methods and programs of preschools, their communication with parents and field workers, who work with disadvantaged families. It is only quality work by preschools in cooperation with field workers that can systematically work on strengthening parental childcare competencies.

In this regard, the new law amendment is again the key element determining the current situation. This could potentially lead to a significant change. If it becomes common that preschools work with the support measures in their day-to-day practice, the preschool environment could become much more open even to children, who are not prepared for institutional upbringing from their home environment. This could possibly lead to a significant change in the area of support of socially disadvantaged children, because it was not a common practice to work with these children in preschools up to this point. Therefore, we will focus on a description of the support measures system in this chapter. In the recommendations, we will explore how to further strengthen the educational system, so that the support measures are actually implemented in practice.

Preschools have the option of providing a child with support measures following a recommendation by a counseling centre and they are then entitled to the necessary financial means. First, the preschool develops a plan of pedagogical support. The plan should include a description of the situation and suggested first degree support measures, the goals of support and a description of how its implementation will be evaluated. All pedagogues, school employers and parents of the child should be familiarized with the plan. One of the goals of the plan should also be developing regular communication with the parents, so that home care is in alignment with professional support. If the situation does not ameliorate, the school asks a counseling centre to develop its recommendations. In these recommendations, the counseling centre should state what specific steps from the second to the fifth degree measures

should the school adopt



(some of the measures start only in the third degree, such as pedagogical assistants). Before implementing second to fifth degree measures, the school is obliged to get an informed permission from the parents.

SUPPORT MEASURES consist of:

- a) counseling for the school by the school counseling centre;
- b) modifications to the organization, content, assessment, education forms and methods and school services, including teaching classes in special pedagogical care and including extending high school or higher specialist education by up to two years;
- c) modifications to the conditions of admission to education and to the conditions for passing a level of education;
- d) using compensatory tools, special textbooks and special learning tools, using communications system for the deaf and deaf-mute, Braille and other support or communication tools;
- e) modifications to the expected education outcomes within the range set by the framework educational programme and accredited educational programs;
- f) education via individual education plan;
- g) pedagogical assistant;
- h) providing educational or school services in constructionally modified premises or;
- i) employment of another pedagogical employee, Czech sign language interpreter, record-keeper for the deaf or presence of other persons providing care for the pupil following special law regulations.

In order for these support measures to be successfully implemented in preschools even for socially disadvantaged children, it is necessary to focus mainly on overall support of the quality of pedagogical work. In this category, we could name many system recommendations, but these would mainly fall under the general area of pedagogical work. One of the main goals should be to include inclusive education competencies in the pedagogical standard, career system of pedagogical staff as well as in curricula of high schools and universities (such as pedagogical diagnostics competences, differentiation, individualization of goals, content, methods and forms of education, support of cooperation between pupils, providing support measures to pupils with special needs or talented pupils, formative assessment, supporting positive behaviour among pupils, preventing difficult behaviour etc.). Subjects focused on the theory and practice of inclusive education should be a part of lifelong training of pedagogues, non-pedagogical staff and pedagogical assistants.

The only key system measure, which could improve parental competences with regards to education, is providing special pedagogues for preschools and primary schools.



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1. **Local level**

Municipality:

Makes sure that there is enough field workers to provide good level of communication between school and parents.

2. **State level**

Ensure that schools have a right to a social pedagogue following the implementation of support measures. As a part of a change in financing, we suggest that pedagogical assistant and special pedagogue are seen as a part of standard school staff – number of these professionals would be adequate to the number of pupils, for which a school would receive money directly from the state budget.

