What this report is about

This report describes the main challenges related to poverty and social inclusion among young people in Czech Republic and provides recommendations for policy makers to address these challenges. The recommendations are based on an analysis of the grass-roots experience of Charita Česká Republika which is compared to official data.

Caritas Cares
Poverty and social exclusion among young people
Czech Republic Report
September 2017

About Caritas Czech Republic

Caritas Czech Republic (Charita Česká Republika) provides services to people who happen to be in distress or in difficult social situations, people with disabilities, the terminally ill, homeless people, substance users, prisoners, victims of domestic violence and trafficking, people affected by extreme events such as floods or fires, as well as migrants and refugees. Caritas helps families, men, women, and children regardless of their age, religion or country of origin. Across the entire country, Caritas organisations provide 822 registered social services, 85 healthcare services and 329 services of other kinds. In 2016, the organisation reached a total of 135,171 beneficiaries in the Czech Republic in these registered services.

Regarding young people and families, Caritas Czech Republic provides 40 emergency shelters for parents with children in need (1,219 families/3,393 beneficiaries in 2016), 4 half-way houses (78 beneficiaries), 69 low-threshold facilities for youth (9,389 beneficiaries) and 59 social activation services for families with children (2,444 beneficiaries).

The following report is based on a questionnaire survey conducted among Caritas social workers, whose scope of work includes young people. The data was collected during April 2017, in total 85 social workers participated. Some of the information included in this report is also based on statements by Caritas expert groups.
Programmes that we carry out aimed at families with children:

- Food support and other basic needs (e.g. FEAD)
- Family counselling and mediation
- Access to employment
- Access to education and training (VET, informal education, early school leaving, drop-outs, etc.)
- Community, volunteering and cultural activities

Programmes that we carry out aimed at young people:

- Access to employment
- Community, volunteering and cultural activities
- Half-way houses, low-threshold facilities

10% of Caritas social services beneficiaries are families with children

Recent publications by Caritas Czech Republic:


Report on the financial situation of families with dependent children

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The Czech Republic's main challenges related to poverty and social exclusion among young people¹:

- **INDEBTEDNESS**: Lack of financial literacy and a deficiency in public policies to mitigate indebtedness locks a number of people in poverty.
  
  Charging households, including descendants, for debt servicing creates incentives against entering into the formal labour market and fosters the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

- **HOMELESSNESS**: Insufficient safety nets are provided to prevent youth homelessness.
  
  Some groups suffer cumulative problems that put them at a higher risk of extreme poverty, living on the streets or in temporary accommodation, poor physical and mental health problems, drug addictions, discrimination, etc.

- **HOUSING**: Commercial rental housing is financially inaccessible to poor and socially excluded groups.
  
  There are no effective policies to ensure affordable housing. Real estate owners tend to exclude certain vulnerable groups from renting flats (e.g. the Roma, single parents, etc.)

- **YOUNG SINGLE PARENTS** are one of the groups most threatened by poverty and social exclusion.

  The labour market is severely limited in offering part time jobs, and childcare services are insufficient. Significant numbers of alimony payments are not paid properly, which causes serious financial problems for many single parents.

**Policy recommendations:**

1. **Conceive an effective policy of managing indebtedness with regards to poverty and access to the labour market**: Protect young people from starting their adult life indebted or discouraged from finding regular employment.

2. **Conceive a measure to fully protect minors from getting indebted and finding themselves in execution on property**.

3. **Prevent people’s demotivation to economic activity caused by the measure of combined household evaluations (“together evaluated persons”) in social benefit calculations**.

4. **Elaborate an effective policy to ensure access to affordable housing for all**: Social housing and additional measures, such as stricter control of the rent market, are urgently needed.

5. **Promote the social economy**: Conceive a legal framework for social enterprises, boost job creation potential; develop principles for social enterprise functioning as well as defining public financial support to the sector.

6. **Conceive measures to ensure stable alimony payments**.

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¹ For the purpose of this report, young people are considered people aged 18 to 29, in line with the criteria of the European Commission. The source of the data in the box is from Eurostat, consulted on 12/05/2017 from the latest available data.
1. Poverty and social exclusion among young people in the Czech Republic: the reality behind the data

The problems of most concern in the Czech Republic

- Over-indebtedness
- Labour market conditions
- Limited access to housing and other benefits

Over-indebtedness

Over-indebtedness is an issue of great concern. In an internal survey undertaken for this report, 68% of Caritas social workers selected over-indebtedness as a worrying problem, and 28% of them as the most worrying problem. Although we lack systematic data about over-indebtedness at country level, the number of those who are in a process of execution on property (property seizure) provides crucial evidence (it impacted 834,000 individuals out of a population of approx. 10 million citizens in 2016, totalling 4.6 million execution procedures). Executions on property mostly impact people in middle age, but 0.3% of procedures were against minors (up to 18 years old, 13,796 cases) and 6.2% were against young people aged 18-27 (297,291 cases). Case histories provided by Caritas social workers reveal that indebtedness of young people is often caused by the actions of their parents, for example when the given service or fine is written on the name of the child/minor, defaulting on payments for communal services, fines (typically for public transport), or telecommunication services. Over-indebtedness is cited as a cause of worsened access to employment or housing. Research conducted among clients of emergency shelters reveals that young people leaving institutional care facilities are at risk of getting indebted because they lack basic knowledge of sound financial habits and get insufficient support after leaving the facility to avoid income poverty.²

A case from the Caritas practice

A 19-year-old pregnant woman, having one child already, came to a Caritas emergency house. Her only income was parental and child allowance. She is from a family where neither her mother nor her step-father worked, and they lived on social benefits in material need. The client had her first child as a minor and her mother administered her income from social benefits. This young woman had debts on communal service payments, a loan and an overdraft account. Inexperienced and unable to manage any economic activity, she didn’t pay her debts regularly and didn’t plan her expenditure until the end of a month. She tried to pay her debts from the maternity grant and through a fictitious marriage for a financial reward, which in the end caused a loss of eligibility for social benefits, and loss of housing. Now, her children are in the care of their grandmother.

(Brno diocese Caritas, anonymous).

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² Czech Enforcement Officers Chamber, 2017, Big five of statistics 2016.
Labour market conditions and protection of income

Caritas social workers identify some groups of young people who are particularly vulnerable – young single mothers, people leaving institutional care facilities, those from socially excluded localities, drug addicts or persons with disabilities. The main obstacles are a lack of job opportunities combined with childcare services, an absence of habits needed for regular employment, and limited education allowing access only to unqualified, low paid jobs. Case histories from Caritas social workers point out that demotivation to work is caused by over-indebtedness, due to high deductions from income in cases of execution on property debt and insolvency. The minimum amount not enforceable is CZK 6,154 (approx. €230).4

Another problem is the measure of combined evaluations (“Together evaluated persons”). This is a method used to calculate social benefits per household. Social benefits are cut if someone else in the household has “sufficient” income, but increased if there are dependent children. If the descendant in a family dependent on social benefits starts to work, and probably for a lower wage, then the social benefits of his/her parents will be cut. This is a disincentive and demotivation to young people to work in cases where their parents are unemployed and living on social benefits, because their income would not improve the material situation of the family nor themselves in particular. This measure, in effect, is an obstacle to gaining independence.

Access to minimum income schemes

Currently, minimum income schemes or other related benefits that are available to young people are:

- Minimum income
- Unemployment benefit
- Scholarship support
- Housing benefit
- Disability benefit
- Child allowance
- Alimony

Young people have access to these schemes and benefits, although none of them is exclusively targeted towards young people. Some of the benefits are accessible only with significant formal and informal barriers, such as cumbersome and lengthy administrative procedures. Generally, the minimum income schemes are moderately adequate. It means that they cover basic needs only, so it is not possible to cover other needs, unexpected expenses or to save any money. In general, the systematic problem is that it is a long and complicated procedure to access benefits, but easy to lose them in cases of any additional income. This is particularly relevant when the person starts to work, because unemployed people are

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often offered precarious and unstable jobs, so they can easily lose their job as well as their benefits. Additionally, starting a new job usually means waiting about 45 days for the first salary, which is impossible to bridge without savings. Such a system systematically demotivates people from trying to change their situation and take on a job.

**Access to employment**

According to Eurostat data for 2016, unemployment among young people, aged 15-29, was at 7.1%, and long term unemployment at 2.1%. These figures are below the EU average – 14.7% and 4.9% respectively – so the situation seems to be favourable. Yet, youth unemployment rates vary regionally and according to education level. A structural problem is seen in technical high school education, especially without a final exam pass, as this education is not adapted to current labour market requirements, and is of low social prestige.\(^5\)

The major problems related to the access of young people to employment are:

- Inadequate or poor quality education (early school-leaving or school drop-outs)
- Lack of professional experience
- Deductions from income due to indebtedness
- Difficulty in combining a job with childcare

**Transmission of poverty**

The transmission of poverty from childhood to young people is a problem. The majority of young beneficiaries of Caritas social services have already experienced poverty and social exclusion during their childhood. The main causes of persistent poverty within generations are that young people, who experience poverty in their childhood, do not have any real idea of different life styles and lack positive role models, so they do not actually know how to improve their situation.

Another problem is the dealing with indebtedness caused by the conduct of the parents. This happens in specific cases, when the service/fine is written against the name of the child/minor in case of payments for community services, telecommunication services, and fines for public transportation. Normally, the parent is supposed to pay these. Arrears on these payments are nothing rare for families experiencing poverty, so the young person can find him/herself indebted because of this. Current public policy seems unable to break this vicious circle.

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Young people at higher risk of poverty

- Young homeless people
- Young single parents

Young homeless people

About 68,500 people in the Czech Republic are without shelter and about 119,000 are threatened by the loss of housing, because they live in uncertain or inappropriate/substandard housing. In addition to elderly people living alone, groups cited as the most vulnerable are single parent households and those with long-term unemployed members. Furthermore, people leaving institutional care facilities are very vulnerable to losing their housing. The root causes of difficult access to housing in the Czech Republic are: the previous massive privatisation of municipality housing stock, rent deregulation, and forced movement to substandard housing, as well as the formation of socially excluded localities.

Apart from the previously mentioned groups, which also include young people, social services providers point out that a great number of young people have difficulties in accessing housing, namely drug users, victims of domestic violence or those having severe conflicts in their families. Caritas social workers, who participated in the data collection for this report, mention the following obstacles in accessing standard housing for young beneficiaries of their services:

- inaccessibility of housing provided by municipalities;
- too high a price for private rented accommodation;
- inability to save enough money for the deposit;
- unwillingness of some real estate owners to rent a flat to Roma people, single parents with children and people coming from emergency shelters or substandard forms of housing.

A Social Housing Act could improve this situation. It is currently in the legislative process. This law would guarantee adequate and affordable housing to those who cannot access rental housing at fair market conditions. However, at the moment, it is impossible to predict when the Act will enter into force.

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Young single parents

The Czech statistics office identifies single parents as one of the groups most at risk of poverty and social exclusion. One in seven Czech families are single-parented, of which 90% are single mothers and 35% of them experience income poverty. Caritas, in collaboration with the Renovabis fund and IBRS, recently conducted a study of the financial situation of families with dependent children. A special focus was put on young single mothers, up to 30 years of age. The findings point out that young single mothers find themselves in financial difficulties significantly more often than other parents – a third of them have serious problems in meeting the needs of their families from their monthly budget. 56% have at least one loan or other type of debt. One in three women in this situation states that paying debts is seriously problematic for them. More than half of young single mothers cannot afford a weeklong holiday in a foreign country or pay an unexpected expense of CZK10,000 (approx. €370). 37% of them state that they cannot invest in an improvement of their housing.

The labour market has limitations for single mothers. Caritas social workers highlight the lack of job opportunities that would be compatible with raising small children – especially for mothers with lower education and no professional experience. In addition, kindergartens are often inaccessible - there are not enough places in public ones and private kindergartens or other forms of delegated childcare are expensive.

A principal cause of single mothers’ poverty are problems with alimony payments. These allowances are calculated based on income of the second parent and the age and number of children in the household. The actual needs of the children or the income of the mother is secondary. Around 40% of alimony payments are not paid properly, and the enforcement thereof is often unsuccessful, which means significant problems for vulnerable families. To reduce the negative impact of the described phenomena, an Advance Alimony Act was supposed to be put into force this year, but it didn’t pass the legislative process. Only families whose income does not exceed 2.7 times the minimum needed to live on, defined as “the lowest socially acceptable amount” that

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11 International Business & Research Services (polling company)
a person needs monthly, would be eligible for this allowance from the state, which would be retrospectively collected from the other parent.\textsuperscript{14}

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Rights that young people have more difficulties in actualising} & \\
\hline
\textbullet{} Right to work & \\
\textbullet{} Right to housing & \\
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Disadvantaged young people in the Czech Republic have more difficulties in securing their rights to work and to housing.

The main problems related to not being able to access these rights are generally related to the following aspects. In respect to the Right to Work, some vulnerable groups lack adequate education that could facilitate labour market entry. We also detect an absence of the particular habits or skills needed for employment, such as time management skills, self-discipline etc. Additionally, there is an obstacle in the form of high deductions from income in cases of execution on property, which makes it impossible to improve one’s life situation through legal employment.

Right to housing: private rental accommodation is financially inaccessible to poor and socially excluded groups. There is a persistent unwillingness of some real estate owners to rent a flat to Roma people, single parents with children and people coming from emergency shelters or substandard forms of housing. The lack of follow-up housing for those who leave institutional care facilities endangers their full integration into society. Furthermore, indebted people are excluded from applying for municipality housing.

\begin{center}
\textbf{BOX 1. Ratification and implementation of the European Social Charter related to young people}
\end{center}

The Czech Republic signed and ratified the 1961 European Social Charter. The country has also signed the 1996 Revised European Social Charter but has NOT YET ratified it.

The Czech Republic has ratified the Additional Protocol providing for a System of Collective Complaints. This allows parliament and civil society to effectively monitor the obligations in fulfilling and providing basic social rights.

More information on the provisions accepted by Czech Republic can be found here.

FACTSHEET: Czech Republic and the European Social Charter

\textsuperscript{14} Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2017, \url{http://www.mpsv.cz/cs/30082}
How effective are the Czech Republic’s policies to fight poverty and social exclusion among young people?

Policies that are having a positive impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policies</th>
<th>Reasons why they are being effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth Guarantee</strong></td>
<td>The Youth Guarantee has existed since 2015. Although it has generated an important policy focus on early integration into the labour market and a successful school to work transition, it is too early to measure the impact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education policies combating early school-leaving and early drop-outs</strong></td>
<td>The government has proposed a Strategy of Inclusive Education, promoting equal and positive conditions for each pupil, reflecting his/her individual needs. This strategy can be considered a measure to tackle early school-leaving. However, it is too early to measure its impact.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Policies that have a limited impact

The following policies are having a limited impact in fighting poverty and social exclusion among young people:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policies</th>
<th>Gaps or reasons why they are not being effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access to affordable housing</strong></td>
<td>The government has not yet devised the instruments for ensuring access to affordable housing. There is no integrated strategy of municipal control of the rent levels, social housing and other instruments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informal education and civic participation</strong></td>
<td>The Youth Policy 2014-2020(^{15}) targets vulnerable groups of young people (those about whom this report is written) to only a very limited extent. The paper includes employment and employability and the facilitation of the inclusion of young people with limited opportunities, but the measures described are rather general.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access to affordable childcare</strong></td>
<td>A guarantee to access childcare will be put into force in September 2017. However, it encompasses only children aged 4 or older.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example of an effective policy or programme related to young people

Municipal ordinances to reduce gambling facilities

Previously poorly regulated gambling businesses, blooming especially in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, created dangerous places and attracted people living in poverty to try to increase their income by gambling, which is an especially perilous route for adolescents and young people.

In 2013, the Constitutional Court stated that it is a competency of municipalities to regulate the running of gambling dens or even forbid them in a given area. Subsequently, many municipalities did so, which created safer urban environments and reduced the possibility of developing addictive habits, which frequently leads into indebtedness.

Example of an ineffective policy or programme related to young people

In 2012, the competency for paying non-social-security benefits was transferred from municipal administration to the Employment offices. This led to work overload of Employment offices’ employees and consequently, complications and delays in benefit payments. Another negative consequence is that the municipalities lack evidence of needy people in their area, which complicates the provision of related social services.

Related to young people, this means that overloaded EO employees don’t have time for an individualised approach and actual, personalised career advice, which would help young people to find appropriate employment.
The European Social Fund (ESF) is contributing to a reduction in poverty and social exclusion among young people. Many social services in the Czech Republic, including Caritas social services, are financed or co-financed by the ESF. These services help beneficiaries, including young people, to cover their basic needs and support them in seeking employment. However, targets that must be reached in many ESF projects are unrealistically high, which decreases the positive impact of a given service (for example, social workers have to service more beneficiaries, so they have less time for each of them, or they have to shorten the maximum duration of accommodation in an emergency shelter, which means that the beneficiary doesn’t have enough time to solve his/her adverse situation). The rather short period of support by the ESF complicates the sustainability of the projects/services.

Providing social services is considered an economic activity benefiting from public support. For larger providers, such as Caritas Czech Republic, this means an obstacle to deriving financial resources from the ESF in cases of de minimis regulation (the rule to protect the market competition). It is an obstacle to providing more complex services, and thus, fails to contribute to reducing poverty and social exclusion among young people.

Example of an effective programme financed by the ESF that has had a positive impact on the reduction of poverty and social exclusion or the prevention of the transmission of poverty to young people.

Most k integraci (Bridge to integration) is a project aimed at supporting social integration by eliminating barriers on the labour market. This project was realised in 2013-2015 in the Northern Bohemia region, which suffers from high unemployment. The target groups of the project were young people up to 25 with no qualification and people 50+ with cumulative disadvantaging factors on the labour market, recruited mainly from Caritas social services beneficiaries. Many of them were members of minorities and inhabitants of socially excluded localities. In total, 60 people were supported. The first phase of the project was about boosting motivation and so-called balance diagnostics (an examination of strengths and weaknesses of the candidate). The second phase consisted of re-qualification courses reflecting the requirements of local employers (especially gardening, heavy manufacturing, and work in social services). In the third phase, some of the participants were employed in subsidised workplaces for 1 year, while others found employment without a subsidy. Psychological support, motivation activities and counselling were provided throughout the whole project.16

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16 Project description: [http://www.charita.cz/o-charite/adresar/?s=most-k-integraci#directory-detail](http://www.charita.cz/o-charite/adresar/?s=most-k-integraci#directory-detail)
Other EU funding schemes that are contributing positively to reducing poverty and social exclusion in the Czech Republic, relative to young people and children, include the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD). Caritas Czech Republic is providing foodstuffs and material aid from FEAD. In FEAD I, almost 200,000 people benefited from the aid (the value of the aid was almost CZK 44 million – approx. €1,630,000). Foodstuff packages and hygiene packages (two types – for homeless people and for children) were distributed anonymously and promptly in cases of sudden need. Good quality commodities in the packages contributed to an improvement of nutrition and hygiene routines of the beneficiaries. In many cases, benefiting from the FEAD programme was the beginning of a long-term collaboration with Caritas and, thus, effective for improving one’s life situation.

The main weakness of the programme is that some beneficiaries tend to rapidly get used to the aid and expect that they will receive it regularly. It can decrease their motivation to seek for a job or otherwise make an effort to improve their situation. Thus, social workers motivate the beneficiaries to put the money (that they saved thanks to the material aid) aside for future prospects (e.g. the deposit for renting an apartment, unexpected expenses).
2. The response of Caritas: promising practices that combat poverty and social exclusion among youth

Caritas social enterprise (Diocese Caritas of Pilsen)

Description
This social enterprise offers services in forestry, gardening and community services. The aim is to provide stable work opportunities to those who have very limited chances on the labour market due to a lack of necessary skills and habits and long-term unemployment.

Problem addressed
Long-term unemployment of socially excluded people.

Results
The social enterprise concluded a contract with Pilsen municipality for gardening work. Since 2016, 10 persons have been put to work and have benefited from the project. Seven of these workers are successfully participating and preparing themselves for entry into the labour market.

Innovative features & success factors
Functional collaboration both with the Municipality and employees provides a sustainable model of employment for disadvantaged people.

Social activation services for families with children

Description
Beneficiaries are families, including single-parent families, in difficult life situations. The aim is to support their competency in child care, managing the household and providing accompaniment. The service is provided to the household of the beneficiary and is free of charge. All
archdioceses and dioceses in the Czech Republic provide this service.

**Problem addressed**

Parents, who are experiencing poverty and social exclusion or are otherwise at risk, frequently lack parenting skills and face difficulties in providing adequate care for their children.

**Results**

Nearly 2,500 beneficiaries (families) in 2016.

**Innovative features & success factors**

As the Social Activation Services is a preventative service, social workers do not interfere with the competency of beneficiaries, but lead them to autonomy and activation of their own capacities and resources. Also they work not only with an individual, but with the family as a whole, which provides a more comprehensive approach.
3. Recommendations to address the described problems

Recommendation 1: Conceive an effective policy of managing indebtedness with regards to poverty and access to the labour market

⇒ Problem addressed if implemented:
Structural disincentives that demotivate over-indebted people to seek work.

⇒ Governmental department or responsible institution that could lead this measure:
Ministry of Justice

⇒ Main arguments supporting this measure:
An employed debtor should always have enough financial resources to ensure a life in dignity for him and his family. Thus, we recommend increasing the protection of income in property execution and insolvency procedures. The minimum non-enforceable amount should be at least the normal expenses for housing plus the minimum living expenditure (not two thirds of this amount as it is now).

High wage deductions are often the obstacle to accessing employment. Indebted persons would rather not work at all or work illegally, which means tax evasion and bypassing of social security. The latter has a negative impact on them, but also on the state. It leads to severe social exclusion and the debt trap.

⇒ Policy framework:
This measure corresponds to Target 1.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): “reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions”.

⇒ How the European Commission could support this measure:
We recommend that the EC addresses over-indebtedness as a priority theme. Caritas Czech Republic considers this topic an important part of our advocacy and we are aware that this problem is present not only in the Czech Republic, but similarly also in other countries, especially post-socialist ones. Apart from preventative measures that would decrease the risk of over-indebtedness, we also advocate for the protection of human rights during execution on property procedures (namely, the Right to Property and Right to Privacy) and accessibility of debt-relief procedures.

Recommendation 2: Conceive a measure to fully protect minors from getting indebted and finding themselves in execution on property

⇒ Problem addressed if implemented:
Indebtedness of young people caused by the actions of their parents.
Governmental department or responsible institution that could lead this measure:

Ministry of Justice, Minister for Human Rights, Equality and Legislation.

Main arguments supporting this measure

Indebtedness due to causes that minors could not control and cannot influence is obviously illogical and unethical.

If a person enters young adulthood indebted, his chances of improving his life situation are weak.

Young people should be protected from becoming indebted in the period when they are minors and are in the position of being dependent children. Such debts should be collected exclusively from their parents, except those that are caused by actions of the minor himself.

Policy framework:

The Revised European Social Charter (Article 17 – Rights of children and adolescents to social, legal and economic protection).

The Decision of the Constitutional court of 15th August 2017 that collecting the payment of communal services from minors does not conform to the Czech Constitution.17

Efforts of the ombudsman to tackle this phenomenon, namely regarding debts from arrears on telecommunication services.18

How the European Commission could support this measure:

Stress the right to protection based on the Investing in Children Recommendation

Recommendation 3: Prevent people’s demotivation to economic activity caused by the measure of combined household evaluations (“together evaluated persons”) in social benefit calculations

Problem addressed if implemented:

Demotivation of young people to work in those situations where the household is dependent on social benefits.

Governmental department or responsible institution that could lead this measure:
Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Minister for Human Rights, Equality and Legislation

Main arguments supporting this measure:
The social benefits calculation, based on combined household evaluations (“together evaluated persons”), is an obstacle preventing socially disadvantaged young people from entering the labour market. It also prevents young people from acquiring sound working habits and long-term, stable employment. It represents a strong disincentive for young people to pursue their autonomy.

We recommend automatic exclusion from evaluating the combined income of household members whose legitimate interest is financial independence.

Policy framework:
The European Social Charter article 1: “right of the worker to earn his living in an occupation freely entered upon.”

This measure corresponds to Target 8.6 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): “By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training.”

How the European Commission could support this measure:
Stress the right to protection based on the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Recommendation 4: Elaborate an Effective Policy to ensure access to Affordable Housing for All

Problem addressed if implemented:
Homelessness, living in sub-standard housing.

Governmental department or responsible institution that could lead this measure:
The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry for Regional Development, Municipalities.

Main arguments supporting this measure:
It is of utmost importance to cease the privatisation of Municipal Social Housing stock and start increasing social housing capacity again. Therefore, the Social Housing Act must be put into force as soon as possible. We recommend adding the following principles to the current version of the Act:
• The legal obligation of all municipalities to provide social housing, with sufficient support by the state. Concrete rules should be adopted for different urban sizes (for example, promote collaboration between bigger “roof” municipalities and smaller ones).
• Right of the beneficiaries to choose their social services provider (for example, the social worker with whom they collaborated before).
• No time limitation to reapply for social housing in cases where it is lost.

The vast majority of social workers cite inaccessibility of decent housing as a main obstacle to escaping poverty and social exclusion. The provision of affordable, decent and stable housing for families would substantially decrease the risk of intergenerational transmission of poverty and social exclusion.

☞ Policy framework:

Social housing strategy in the Czech Republic 2015-2025, Revised European Social Charter (article 31).

This measure corresponds to Target 11.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): “ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing (…)”.

☞ How the European Commission could support this measure:

Stress that the Social Housing Act is a priority, within the European Semester Process, based on Country Specific Recommendations from February 2017.19

Recommendation 5: Promote the social economy

☞ Problem addressed if implemented:

Long-term unemployment of disadvantaged groups, among others single parents.

☞ Governmental department or responsible institution that could lead this measure:


☞ Main arguments supporting this measure:

There is a need for a legal framework for social enterprises and the principles of their functioning, such as reinvestment of their profits or their operation for social goals, employment of disadvantaged people, etc. as well a definition of the financial support that these companies would receive.

Disadvantaged people have poor opportunities on the labour market. They often face precarious working conditions. Quality employment would support their social inclusion and improve their opportunities on the regular labour market.

Policy framework:
White paper for Social Entrepreneurship Act (Z75/16 Věcný záměr zákona o sociálním podnikání). This measure corresponds to target 8.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): “By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value”.

How the European Commission could support this measure:
Continue to support social entrepreneurship financially through the ESF and strengthen this support. Eliminate the limitations of access to these resources for social services providers (as previously mentioned, the de minimis regime and too high targets).

Recommendation 6: Conceive measures to ensure stable alimony payments

Problem addressed if implemented:
Poverty of single parents (who, in the vast majority, are women) related to defaults on alimony payments for child(ren) by the other parent.

Governmental department or responsible institution that could lead this measure:
The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Minister for Human Rights, Equality and Legislation.

Main arguments supporting this measure:
An Act on Advanced Alimony Payments was prepared by the government, but didn’t pass the legislative process. It is the right of every child to receive the necessary financial and material resources. We support the principle of advanced alimony (the state provides advanced alimony to the parents who don’t receive it properly from their former partner and the money is then retrospectively collected from the defaulting parent. But this version of the Act limits eligibility for this support based on the income level of the household. We suggest that all parents

affected by this problem should be eligible for advanced alimony, because the limit can demotivate parents from increasing their income from work.

We also think that there is room for improvement regarding the prevention of conflicts between parents. Increasing accessibility of mediation and marital counselling, as well as promoting the currently tested “Cochem model”\(^{21}\) of divorces, could positively influence alimony payments.

**Policy framework:**


The White paper of Advanced Alimony Act\(^ {22}\) (Návrh zákona o zálohovém výživném).

**How the European Commission could support this measure:**

Stress the need for putting the Advanced Alimony Act into practice in the next Country Specific Recommendations in the European Semester Process.


\(^{22}\) [https://www.socialpolicy.cz/?p=2693](https://www.socialpolicy.cz/?p=2693)
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