

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS 2021–2029

MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS



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List of Abbreviations

CR – Czech Republic

CZSO – Czech Statistical Office

EU – European Union

FFE – Fund for Further Education

FMFA – Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs

PMI – Project management institute.

MoF – Ministry of Finance

MoLSA – Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

MoRD – Ministry of Regional Development

MEYS – Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

MoJ – Ministry of Justice

Mol – Ministry of the Interior

MoFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MoH – Ministry of Health

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

SFC – Substitute family care (foster care)

UN – United Nations

BSLPC – Body for Social and Legal Protection of Children

SLPC – Social and legal protection of children

OPDP – Office for Personal Data Protection

1 INTRODUCTION

As of 31 December 2019, the Czech Republic was home to a total of 1,999,465 children (persons under 18 years of age), which represents 18.70% of the population.¹ In the same year, the bodies for social and legal protection of children registered a total of 167,053 cases of endangered children² (i.e. almost every twelfth child in the Czech Republic is registered with the administrative body for the protection of children). Helping an endangered child is not only a basic duty of every developed and civilized society, but also a rational investment in the future.

The aim of this National Strategy for the Protection of Children's Rights 2021–2029 (hereinafter the “Strategy”) is to create a system of cooperation that will ensure the protection of children and at the same time improve the quality of life of children and families who find themselves in difficult life situations.³ It involves a cooperation between the professional community and public, public administration (state administration, self-government) and non-governmental sector (voluntary initiatives, non-profit organizations, etc.).

The measures proposed by the Strategy are based on several sources:

- The results of the previous government strategic documents in the field of protection of children's rights.
- Reports on the progress towards the Czech Republic's commitments arising from the adoption of international conventions and related recommendations.
- Research and analysis in the field of protection of children's rights, care for vulnerable children, social exclusion, etc.
- Knowledge from everyday practice of the professional community and methodological work of relevant public administration bodies.

The formulation of objectives and measures of the new Strategy is also based on the outputs of three individual projects of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, which

¹ Czech Statistical Office, Age structure of the population, 2019. Available at: <https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/vekove-slozeni-obyvatelstva-2019>

² Under the conditions defined in Section 6 of the Act on the Social and Legal protection of Children.

³ The Concept of Family Policy was approved within the Government in 2017 focuses on supporting families and children. Others concepts focused on this topic are listed in the Strategy.

carried out a number of research and analytic documents to map individual segments of the system of care for vulnerable children, to identify obstacles to the exercise of children's rights and limits of services to support vulnerable children and families within this system. Their outputs also contain system recommendations for the overall optimization of the system, which will be a very important basis for the formulation of objectives and system measures in the coming period. The projects also supported the implementation of adopted legislative changes (especially changes introduced by the amendment to the Act on Social and Legal Protection of Children) in practice, which included the training of workers working directly with vulnerable children, creation and pilot verification of tools used in providing social and legal protection of children and methodological materials describing the application in practice. As integral part they also included the support of children's participation in decision-making on matters that directly concern them. An overview of system projects of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is given in the table below.

Table No 1 Overview of individual projects of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

Project	Implementation period:	Funding source
System support of processes for the transformation of the system of care for vulnerable families and children	01/2012 – 06/2015	ESF, OP HRE
Programme CZ04: At-risk children and youth	01/2014 – 08/2016	FM2 EEA/Norway
System development and support of the tools of social and legal protection of children	01/2016 – 06/2019	ESF, OPE

The National Strategy for the Protection of Children's Rights 2021–2029 contains the main objectives of government policy in this area and the basic framework of measures. Details for shorter time periods will be elaborated in subsequent action plans. We believe that the National Strategy for the Protection of Children's Rights for the period 2021–2029 and related action plans will be a useful and effective framework for measures taken to ensure that children in the Czech Republic live a quality life, grow up in a safe family environment and gain opportunities to develop their potential.

2 BASIC BACKGROUND

2.1. International obligations of the Czech Republic

As a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereinafter the "Convention")⁴, the Czech Republic is committed to respecting and securing the rights of children as set out in the Convention, the adherence to the Convention being guaranteed by the State. In order to implement these international commitments, the Government of the Czech Republic has in the past adopted several strategic documents. The body responsible for the implementation of the Convention is the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Progress towards government strategies is monitored by the Interministerial Coordination Group for the Transformation of the System of Care for Vulnerable Children, composed of representatives of key ministries involved in the protection of children's rights and civil society.

The action period of the previous *National Strategy for the Protection of Children's Rights "The Right to Childhood"*, approved by Government Resolution No 4 of 2011, ended at the end of 2018. In response to this, Government Resolution No 871 of 9 December 2019 on the Plan of Non-Legislative Tasks of the Government of the Czech Republic for 2020, instructed the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to prepare by 31 July 2020 the follow-up *National Strategy for the Protection of Children's Rights* (hereinafter the "Strategy").

The previous strategic document reflected in particular the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, adopted on 17 June 2011 following the discussion of the third and fourth periodic reports documenting the Czech Republic's activities in implementing the Convention since 2003. In the course of 2020, representatives of the Government of the Czech Republic are to participate in the discussion of the fifth and sixth periodic reports of the Czech Republic documenting activities for the implementation of the Convention from the beginning of 2011 to the end of 2017⁵ before the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva. The

⁴ Communication of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs No 104/1991 on the convention on the rights of the child.

⁵ Joint 5th and 6th periodic reports on the fulfilment of obligations arising from the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Available at: <https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/rfp/dokumenty/zpravy-plneni-mezin-umluv/deti-text-.docx>.

outcome of the meeting will be the recommendations of this committee for the Czech Republic on changes in the field of protection of children's rights for the next period, which should be reflected again in the Strategy and in its implementing action plans.

In view of the situation caused by the COVID-19 epidemic, the discussion of periodic reports on the fulfilment of obligations under the Convention was postponed to a later date. With regard to the updated deadlines set in the Plan of Non-Legislative Tasks of the Government of the Czech Republic for 2020, the National Strategy for the Protection of Children's Rights 2021–2029 is thus submitted without defining final recommendations. However, the aforementioned fifth and sixth periodic reports and the so-called "shadow report" are available, which assess the situation in this area from the perspective of the non-governmental sector.

2.2. Evaluation of progress towards previous strategic documents in the field of protection of children's rights and care of vulnerable children

Based on the evaluation of the current progress in the reform of the system of care for vulnerable children, it can be stated that despite a number of successfully completed tasks of *the National Strategy for the Protection of Children's Rights – The Right to Childhood* and the follow-up *Action Plan for Implementing the National Strategy for the Protection of Children's Rights 2012–2015*, there are still a number of objectives with the potential for further improvement. A detailed evaluation of both documents is included in the *Final report on the progress towards the Action Plan for implementing the National Strategy for the Protection of Children's Rights 2012–2015*, which was acknowledged by the Government by Resolution No 467 of 23 May 2016.

The main reason for the delay in the process was the fact that the Czech government did not manage to discuss the *Action Plan for Implementing the National Strategy for the Protection of Children's Rights 2016–2020*, which directly followed up with its measures on the plan for the years 2012–2015 and aimed at the final attainment of strategic goals of the *National Strategy for the Protection of Children's Rights – The Right to Childhood*. As part of the discussion of the new strategy, it is therefore necessary, among other things, to set up a communication system between the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Health and other public administration bodies.

One of the fundamental steps of the reform was the amendment to Act No 359/1999 *on the social and legal protection of children, as amended* (hereinafter the “SLPC Act”), which entered into force on 1 January 2013. The amendment supported a shift in the focus of work with vulnerable children towards family rehabilitation and prevention of placement of children in alternative care outside their own family, reduction of institutional care and expansion of alternative family care as more suitable alternatives for caring for vulnerable children who cannot either temporarily or permanently grow up in their own family. Priority was given to those measures of social and legal protection of children that ensure the care of the child in his or her family environment and, if this is not possible, in an alternative family environment. Social work tools have been put into practice, such as assessing the situation of vulnerable children and their families, developing an individual child protection plan and case conferences, which help the cooperation and coordination of procedures of all relevant institutions and experts to help address the situation of vulnerable children. An important step was also the introduction of standardization of the performance of social and legal protection of children provided by bodies of social and legal protection of children and authorized persons in order to achieve a quality, transparent, effective and non-discriminatory system of care for vulnerable children. A significant positive step was also the setting up of system support for carers and registered persons providing care for children in a foster family environment.

It can be stated that although several government strategies have been adopted since 2007 concerning changes to the system of care for vulnerable children, which were implemented mainly by means of three complex individual projects of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, this system continues to have shortcomings that prevent the complete exercise of the rights of children guaranteed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international obligations. The progress so far can be assessed as the implementation of partial changes, which have brought undeniably positive effects, which are reflected in some quantitative indicators on the situation of children (e.g. in a very gradual decrease in the number of children growing up in institutional care of residential facilities for children). However, there was no success in promoting systemic changes of a legislative nature and in the area of financing the system, which are steps that require agreement between all key ministries responsible for individual parts of the system of

care for vulnerable children. In practice, it has proven difficult to reach an agreement on the overall optimization of the system of care for vulnerable children.

2.3. Přístup k opatřením uvedených ve Strategii a jejich interpretace Cíle a opatření Strategie jsou formulována s vědomím existence řady strategických dokumentů, jež také zahrnují ochranu práv dětí a s ní spojená opatření. Jedná se zejména o Národní strategii sociálního začleňování 2021-2030; Národní strategii rozvoje sociálních služeb 2016-2025; Akční plán prevence domácího a genderově podmíněného násilí na léta 2019-2022; Národní akční plán pro duševní zdraví 2020 až 2030; Dlouhodobý záměr vzdělávání a rozvoje vzdělávací soustavy ČR 2019-2023; 9 Koncepti rodinné politiky 2017; Koncepti sociálního bydlení pro roky 2015-2025; Národní strategii primární prevence rizikového chování dětí a mládeže na období 2019-2027; Strategii reformy psychiatrické péče 2013; Národní strategii primární prevence rizikového chování dětí a mládeže na období 2019–2027; Zdraví 2020. Strategie rovněž počítá s připravovanými vládními strategiemi jako je Akční plán přechodu od ústavní péče k podpoře v komunitě s pomocí terénních, ambulantních a pobytových sociálních služeb komunitního typu pro léta 2019-2021; Národní plán podpory rovných příležitostí pro osoby se zdravotním postižením na období 2021- 2025; Strategie vzdělávací politiky ČR do roku 2030+ a Strategie rovnosti žen a mužů na léta 2021-2030. Snahou Strategie je, aby umožnila vznik otevřeného systému, který reaguje na potřeby ohrožených dětí a rodin a který je zároveň k dispozici všem dětem a rodinám, jež shledají potřebu jeho využití. Současně je nastavení Strategie plně v souladu s § 81 odst. 1 nového občanského zákoníku, kdy je respektováno svobodné rozhodnutí člověka žít podle svého. Jednotlivá opatření, která jsou uvedena ve Strategii, je nutno vykládat s ohledem na skutečnost, zda se jedná o výkon veřejné moci nebo o rozvoj sítě dobrovolně využívaných služeb. Rozdíl v obou oblastech spočívá především v tom, že vstup správních orgánů do života dítěte i jeho rodiny je ze své povahy nedobrovolný, a proto musí být úzce ohraničen a přesně vymezen, a to s odkazem na čl. 4 Listiny základních práv a svobod. Platí zde daleko přísnější pravidla než v situacích, kdy se dítě a jeho rodina rozhodnou využívat nabízené služby, které fungují na principu dobrovolnosti a kdy je zásadní svobodný a informovaný souhlas rodiny a dítěte.

3 ANALYTICAL PART (SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON THE ISSUE OF CHILD PROTECTION AND CARE FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN)

3.1. Identified system deficits

In recent years, a number of research and analytic documents have been prepared in the Czech Republic focusing on the state of protection of children's rights and the system of care for vulnerable children (see the list of sources at the end of the document). Based on this research, we can conclude the following **major system deficits**:

- Horizontal and vertical fragmentation and complexity of the system, unclear competencies and responsibilities between individual managers. The individual components of the system fall under the responsibility of various ministries (especially the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Health) and under various levels of public administration. It involves different approaches to management, rights and needs of the child, methodological management and financing.
- A system divided among different ministries **does not take into account the needs of children** which are complex in nature and cover different areas of a child's life. The relevant components of the system focus on individual areas in the child's life (health needs, educational needs, etc.). The importance of the child's stable relationships with family and loved ones is underestimated.
- There is a lack of **a comprehensive quality management system across the entire system of services for vulnerable children**. Social services, services provided under the regime of social and legal protection of children and services within the school or health care system have their own quality management methods, which are applied in isolation. However, the system also includes services for children, for which there are no binding quality standards regulated by law and methodologies that would unify work procedures across the system and guarantee quality and effective protection of all children.
- In decision-making processes **the opinion of the child is not sufficiently taken into account** (often the child is not even heard), mechanisms for involving children and young people in decision-making processes at all levels are absent or underused.

- **There is a large system permeability.** Without applying more favourable procedures and methods of work for the child, the child often finds himself in the most expensive and least suitable form of care, which is institutional care. The requirement that the placement of a child in institutional care is only the last option in the care for a vulnerable child and that children be placed in residential facilities only if all other possibilities of helping the child and his family have been exhausted is not always met. Conversely, permeability is very low back towards the natural family environment.
- **The financial flows in the system are unevenly distributed.** The results of the *2018 Analyse of financing the system of care for vulnerable children*⁶ point out that financial resources invested in institutional care continue to account for the largest share of funds (42%) of the total amount of funds spent in the system. Together with the financial resources intended for substitute family care (36%), they then make up 78% of the total amount of funds that are invested in alternative childcare, which focuses on addressing the consequence of limited family competencies in childcare rather than prevention. Only 8% of funds are spent on preventive services for vulnerable children and their families, which should be a pillar of a functioning care system for vulnerable children, which should receive the largest financial support to ensure timely assistance to children and their families to avert the risk of placing the child in institutional care (see table no. 2). *This structural deficit is being addressed unsystematically through European Union funds, which, however, are primarily intended for development and not for financing the “operation” of the system.*⁷

Table 2: Non-investment expenditures of public budgets in the system of care for vulnerable children in 2016 (CZK thousands); share of individual areas in total expenditures

Type of expenditure	2016	Expenditure share (%)
Public-law protection of children	1,552.4	14.4

⁶ MACELA, M. (2018), *Analýza financování systému péče o ohrožené děti*. According to this financing analysis, expenditures from public budgets to finance the system of care for children at risk amounted in 2016 to annually **CZK 10.8 billion**. These expenses were distributed mainly among the chapters of the State 313 – Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 333 – Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 335 – Ministry of Health, 398 – General Treasury Administration, or some other central state administration bodies and also among the budgets of regions and municipalities.

⁷⁷ MACELA, M. (2018), *Analýza financování systému péče o ohrožené děti*. Str.61.

Preventive services	853.0	7.9
Substitute family care (foster care)	3,882.9	36.0
Institutional education	4,497.7	41.7
TOTAL	10,786.0	100.0

Chart 1: Distribution of public budget expenditures in the system of care for vulnerable children (2016)

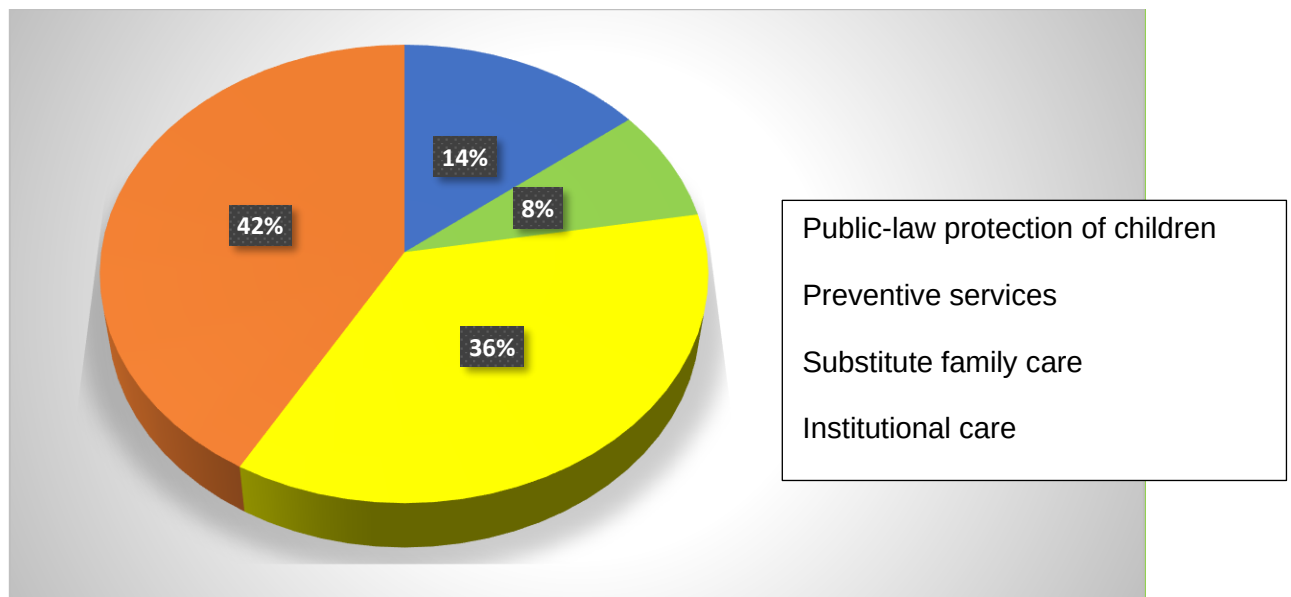


Table No 3 provides an overview of major system flaws that require suitable mechanisms to eliminate them (also via the targeted planning of systemic innovation, new forms of system actors, involvement of informal types of assistance, etc.).

Table 3: An overview of systemic problems in the field of care for vulnerable children⁸

Topic	Identified system problem
Early intervention	Problems in families and parental care are identified late. There are no system mechanisms to support families with children where emerging and potential problems arise.
A holistic view of the child's needs	The system is fragmented in terms of sectors and competences. This fragmentation takes place from the national level (competences divided among a number of ministries), through the regional level (to some extent analogous to the situation at the national level) to municipalities (relatively smallest here). Thus there is no "holistic" view of the child's needs and the interest of the child. Services provided to families are usually within a very

⁸ Institute of Project Management Hradec Králové (2017). Analysis of Innovative Procedures and Services for Families and Children in the Czech Republic P. 66n.

	narrow framework that focuses only on the sub-sector of the child's needs (health, education, social, etc.).
“Gatekeeping”	There is a high “permeability” of the system of care for children at risk towards substitute forms of care, for some groups of children towards institutional care. Children find themselves in more expensive and less suitable types of substitute care without using the opportunity to work with their own family and help the family.
Network of services	There is a lack of services to provide basic assistance for families with children and support development of basic parenting skills. This problem is compounded by the underestimation of the importance of relationships between the child and the parent (when the problem is found, it often happens to place a child outside the family). The availability of services for families and children varies by regions. There is no guaranteed “minimum” network of services, its form or the clear responsibility for creating such a network is not established.
Multidisciplinary services	There are no available specialised multidisciplinary services (or systems coordinating these services) that can respond to children with high levels of support (especially children with severe health, mental or combined disadvantages; children with mental illness, children and young people ⁹ with serious educational problems, children and young people who are users of addictive substances, etc.). A similar situation exists in the case of some professional services for parents.
Material family support	Poverty is one of the main factors of risk for children and families. Social disadvantage is also reflected in other areas of family life, such as access to health care and other professional services, education, etc. The current benefit system does not contain motivational elements for change (or only in the form of negative motivation, threat of reduction or withdrawal of benefits, etc.).
Social housing	Inappropriate housing conditions or a loss of housing are an essential limit for all family support activities. With a family without stable housing, that often alternates between places of residence, it is not possible to work continuously and systematically.
New topics for working with families	Some major life events (such as family member deaths), situations and needs (such as eating disorders, cyberbullying) are set out of common forms of assistance.
New forms of cooperation	There are no functional and stable systems of cooperation designed to prevent children from being at risk and to address the specific needs of children and families.
Quality management	There is no comprehensive system of quality assessment of provided services and (social) work, system workers are exposed to high case-load, in some cases they lack the necessary competencies to work with the target group. There is no comprehensive system of education of BSLPC employees focused on improving the quality of work.

⁹ The term “young people” in the Strategy refers to minors from the age of 16 and young adults up to the age of 26. A broader definition is especially important for creating appropriate measures for this difficult to define group in the field of substitute education, substitute family care and also in some types of social services (eg halfway houses). The period of adolescence and “fresh” adulthood is in the Czech legislation divided into systems of social and legal protection of children, social services and social work with adults. It is necessary to adapt the support system so that young people can plan their future, entry into adulthood and independence.

3.2. Identified shortcomings in selected target groups

The outputs of existing research and analysis and statistics allow us to make **summary conclusions** in the form of identifying target groups to whose needs the current system does not respond adequately (see Table 4) and where there is potential for solutions through the introduction of new types of services, support and assistance.

Table 4: Target groups at risk of social exclusion and other negative social phenomena¹⁰

Target group	Defined problem
Children and young people with a combined disadvantage	Non-existence of holistic care (lack of interconnection of the health, school and social area), unavailability of professional assistance.
Children and young people at risk of parental conflicts	Late identification of problems, children become “hostages” in the conflict of parents, which leads to more difficult assistance
Children and young people with serious educational problems	Using institutional care as a major measure in case of serious educational problems of children and young people, late work with problems.
Children and young people with problematic drug abuse	Little availability of addiction treatment services for these groups.
Children and young people with mental illness	Non-existent socio-health services and co-operation systems for children with a mental illness.
Numerous sibling groups	In the case of entrusting children to substitute care, siblings are separated, removing the child from the family is perceived as “relieving” the family and creating space for care for other children; complicated provision of substitute family care.
Young people leaving substitute types of care or inactive family backgrounds	The incoherence of the system of social and legal protection of children and social work with adults, lack of services for the target group, lack of social housing.
Mothers (parents) from a socially disadvantaged environment	Unpreparedness for parenting, lack of competence in education, employment, health care, etc.
Minor mothers (minor parents) from socially disadvantaged backgrounds	Lack of a system of supported housing with accompanying services that support people in a parental role and eliminate the risks of family breakdown (removal of a new-born child from the family).

¹⁰ Institute of Project Management Hradec Králové (2017). Analysis of Innovative Procedures and Services for Families and Children in the Czech Republic P. 66n.

Parents with a mental illness	Non-existent social and health services and co-operation systems for parents with a mental illness.
Parents with the problematic use of addictive substances (alcohol and non-alcoholic)	Lack of interconnection of services for addiction treatment of and services to support parenting (parental isolation from the child), system prejudice.
Parents whose child has been taken away from their care (including parents serving prison sentence)	Non-existence of a system of work with parents whose child has been taken away (or is repeatedly taken away) from their care.
Divorcing or separating parents, families in which domestic violence takes place (both physical and psychological)	Complicated “delivery” of assistance in the event of violent conflicts.

The aim of these changes, which are comprehensively outlined in the 2011 National Strategy for the Protection of Children’s Rights “Right to Childhood”, is to create a child protection system that will allow as many children as possible to grow up in their own family environment. This goal cannot be achieved without a developed network of services, provided especially on a preventive basis. National research has addressed this issue¹¹ and partial regional studies carried out in the Pardubice region¹², Moravian-Silesian Region¹³ and the Zlín Region¹⁴. Among other things, these researches described the most common causes of placing children in institutions / substitute family care and the main deficits of the current system of care for vulnerable children in the region. Regional analyses identified the most endangered groups of children and families. In the first place, these are children growing up in families with a lower social status, living in socially disadvantaged conditions (poverty, social exclusion, unemployment, indebtedness, endangered by housing loss)¹⁵. These are usually parents with low education and a low awareness

¹¹ For example *Analysis of Innovative Procedures and Services for Families and Children in the Czech Republic* Hradec Králové Project management institute. 2018.

¹² Analysis of measures and services needed to prevent acceptance of new children into the facilities involved in the project “Transforming the Care of Children and the Youth at Risk”. Hradec Králové: Project management institute. 2015. 57 p.

¹³ *Analysis of the current state of substitute family care in the Moravian-Silesian Region*. Ostrava: SocioFactor. 2015, here at p. 249n.

¹⁴ Analysis of the needs of children and families. Ostrava: SocioFactor. 2015. The outputs of the analysis are available in the document Conceptual Theses. Available at: <https://www.kr-zlinsky.cz/ohrozene-deti-a-mladez-ve-zlinskem-kraji-cl-3122.html> [cit. 21/02/2017].

¹⁵ The 2013 Social and Demographic Analysis by SocioFactor showed a direct link between removing children from families and poverty in the Czech Republic.

of the importance of education for their children as well. Very often, this involves repeated inoperative family model, i.e. parents who themselves grew up in a non-functional family or underwent institutional care. Lower incentive to a change and creation of a strong dependence on assistance from authorities and services ("professional client") is a risk for this group of families. An increased risk of dependence on the service was identified in parents without stable housing, who use the services of reception centre or facilities for children requiring immediate help (so-called voluntary stays connected with parental skills training). On the part of assistance and service providers, this dependence is supported by some factors in a systemic way, above all, by insufficient motivational elements of the system and the lack of continuity or coordination of individual types of assistance. It is a common phenomenon that a large number of entities are working with the family and the family is in contact with several services and professionals. If there is no coordination between them, the activities developed for the benefit of the family are inefficient and, in some cases, counter-productive.

According to the Czech Statistical Office, families with children are among the groups at increased risk of income poverty.¹⁶ The at-risk-of-poverty rate, which is calculated as the share of persons living in households whose income is lower than the set at-risk-of-poverty line, reached 10.1% in 2019. It therefore concerns approximately every tenth citizen of the Czech Republic. Unemployed, households made up of a single parent with one or more children and individuals aged 65 and over, especially women, are still the most vulnerable groups. Of those who were mostly unemployed in 2019, more than half (52.7%) were at risk of income poverty. Almost a third (30.8%) of persons from single-parent families with children were at risk of income poverty and over 17% of persons from families with three or more children. Another important phenomenon that currently disadvantages children in the Czech Republic is the issue of executions (property repossession).

However, the children are vulnerable not only due to poverty. For a number of families with a higher social status, late seeking help or a fear of certain stigmatisation when working with a "social" system is a common problem. Divorce conflicts, lack of attention from parents (the family does not manage care for

¹⁶ Czech Statistical Office. *Income and living conditions of households – 2019*. Available at: <https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/prijmy-a-zivotni-podminky-domacnosti-2019>.

*workload, parents lack sufficient parental competencies, etc.) or, on the other hand, too high family and surrounding pressure on the child and its performance are the cause of children becoming vulnerable (which in some cases leads to serious educational problems, problematic use of addictive substances, etc.). These children often need psychological and, in some cases, psychiatric care. However, this is only a part of the solution of the problem. If these families turn to a professional service, it is often a request to solve the child's problems. However, they do not admit the need for change on the part of the parents themselves and the family system.*¹⁷

3.3. Consequences of system deficits

The system deficits described in the previous text are manifested in a number of areas, especially the lower quality of life of some children and families, their long-term dependence on the social system, unclear life prospects, etc. One of the consequences of these deficits is also the increasing number of children growing up away from their own family. In addition, the Czech Republic has been characterized for a long-time **high number of children growing up in institutional care**. According to available statistical data, there has been a slight decrease in the number of children in institutional care in recent years (see Table 5), but it should also be noted that due to the current method of reporting, these data may not be completely accurate.¹⁸ The actual number of children who undergo institutional education in the Czech Republic is significantly higher than follows from partial statistical information (their compilation is necessary). For example, the data on the “state” as of the last day of the year reported by the bodies of social and legal child protection of children excludes children who spent shorter time in an institution during the year.

¹⁷ *Analysis of Innovative Procedures and Services for Families and Children in the Czech Republic* Hracec Králové Project management institute. 2018.

¹⁸ Relatively detailed data in this direction are provided by school statistics (statistical yearbooks of education) capturing all children who have passed through school facilities for institutional or protective education in a given period. However, this period is the school year, while other types of statistics work with the calendar year period. On the other hand, the annual reports of social and legal protection authorities contain information on the absolute numbers of children placed in a given type of facility as of 31 December of the calendar year. Information from health statistics is quite incomplete, and it is also published with a significant time lag.

Table 5: Number of children placed in institutional care in 2011–2019

	School facilities¹⁹	Children's homes for children under 3 years of age.	Home for persons with disabilities	Facilities for children requiring immediate assistance	TOTAL
2011	7150	1428	834	995	10407
2012	6941	1397	769	1020	10127
2013	6549	1233	646	1088	9516
2014	6495	1213	577	1259	9544
2015	6482	1174	538	778	8972
2016	6500	1037	595	629	8761
2017	6345	922	447	720	8434
2018	6394	881	429	504	8208
2019	6553	818	435	523	8329

At the same time, according to knowledge from developmental psychology, institutional education also represents, in terms of applicable legal regulations²⁰, the least suitable and at the same time the most expensive type of childcare (see the comparison of the average monthly costs of public budgets per child by individual types of interventions in Table 6).

¹⁹ The data also include young adults residing in school facilities for institutional or protective education in the form of a so-called “contractual stay”.

²⁰ Pursuant to Section 972 of Act No 89/2012, the Civil Code, institutional care can be ordered only as a necessary measure, while the care of a natural person (substitute family care) always takes precedence. According to the same legal regulation, “insufficient housing conditions or property conditions of the child’s parents or persons entrusted with the care of the child” cannot in themselves be grounds for a court decision on institutional care if the parents are otherwise qualified to ensure the child’s proper upbringing and other obligations arising from their parental responsibility. In practice, however, there is frequent placement of children in residential facilities for social reasons.

Table 6: Average costs of public budgets per child and month by type of intervention (data for 2016).²¹

Facility type	Cost per child/month (CZK)
Field work with family	7,249
Substitute family care (foster care)	19,984
Institutional care, including:	44,570
Children's homes	36,323
Orphanages with school	54,422
Juvenile correction institutions	74,203
Children's homes for children under 3 years of age	55,111
Home for persons with disabilities	27,690
Facilities for children requiring immediate assistance	22,800
Diagnostic institutes	69,103

A significantly more suitable solution for children who cannot grow up in the care of their own parents is **substitute family care**. The development of substitute family care was made possible by the above-mentioned amendment to the Act on the Social and Legal Protection of Children of 2012. There was a significant increase in the remuneration of foster parents and the introduction of a system of professional services to support the performance of substitute family care. Thanks to the measures taken, it was possible to provide care for a larger number of children in a family environment after 2013, when the amendment came into force (see Chart 2). However, in addition to the number of children growing up in institutional care, there is **increase in the total number of children in substitute forms of care**.

In recent years, the dynamics of changes brought about by the change in the 2012 legislation is decreasing, which is also reflected in a decrease in the number of foster

²¹ MACELA, M. (2018). In the case of facilities for children requiring immediate assistance, the average monthly public budget costs are even higher. The analysis lists only system resources (there is a state allowance for the founders of children's facilities requiring immediate assistance in the amount of CZK 22,800 per month) and not one-off donations or non-system subsidies, even if they are provided from public budgets. As for the cost of field work, this is a theoretical example, respectively calculation of wage and overhead costs in a situation where two social workers (one in the field of public protection of children and the other in the field of services) would work with the child and family and at the same time each of them worked with 10 children and families at the same time. The analysis states that in practice they are average costs are even lower, as the number of 10 families per worker is in the practice of the Czech Republic so far unreal).

carers (especially temporary foster carers who perform a crisis function in the system) as well as new persons interested in substitute family care (see Chart 3).

Chart 2: Number of children placed in substitute family care in 2008–2019²²

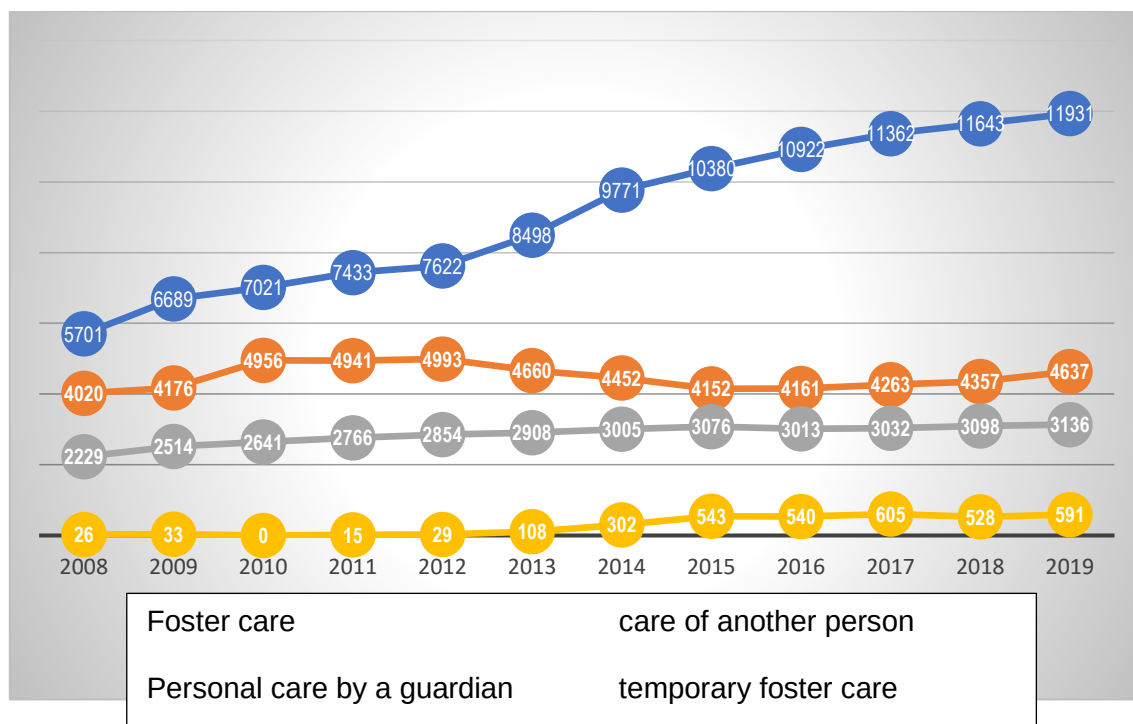
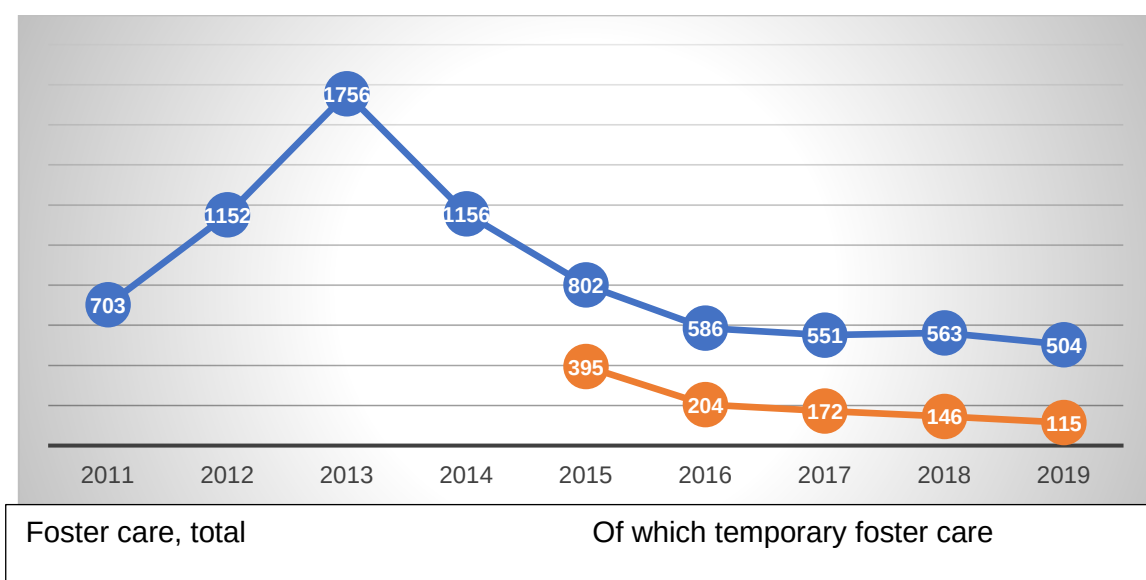


Chart 3: Number of applicants for inclusion in the register for the mediation of foster care or inclusion in the register of persons authorized to provide transitional foster care in 2011–2019



²² Annual report on the performance of socio-legal protection of children (MoLSA) 20-01.

Conclusions

Based on the data resulting from the analytical part of the Strategy, it is possible to formulate general conclusions (recommendations) for the definition of measures in the proposal part of the Strategy. For the following period of validity of the Strategy (2021–2029), the following is recommended:

- **Increase general awareness of children's rights among the public, to unify approaches to these rights in the provision of services to this target group, within the framework of public protection of children, education, social and health systems, etc.**
- **Continue activities aimed at unifying the system of child protection and care for vulnerable children, coordination of activities and interdisciplinary cooperation so that it is possible to better respond to the holistic needs of children and families.**
- **Strengthen the offer of preventive assistance and services so that cases of limited parental care and endangerment of children can be effectively prevented and the number of children forced to grow up away from their families can be reduced.**
- **Support the offer of educational, leisure and other activities increasing the quality of life of children and families. Special attention must be paid to equalizing opportunities for children with disabilities.**
- **Implement measures in the area of public and judicial protection of children (activities of bodies of social and legal protection of children, courts, etc.) aimed at greater efficiency in the implementation of administrative agendas, reducing the time of court proceedings and improving decision-making processes.**
- **Develop substitute family care as a suitable solution for situations where a child cannot grow up temporarily or permanently in their own family, support those interested in substitute parenting and increase the quality of care provided and public awareness of substitute family care.**
- **Implement reforms in the area of institutional childcare aimed at greater openness of the system, interconnection of individual specialisations, integration of residential services into the normal social environment.**

Due to the complexity of child protection and care for vulnerable children (activities in individual areas are interrelated), the measures of the Strategy are formulated through several cross-cutting themes (unification of approaches to children's rights; elimination of threats, or ensuring safe care primarily in the family environment; for disadvantaged children, involving children in decision-making processes that affect them, improving the quality of life of children and families with children, continuous monitoring of developments in the area, or the creation of a quality management system, data collection and evaluation).

4 PROPOSAL PART

Target group

The National Strategy for the Protection of Children's Rights 2021–2029 does not focus only on vulnerable children in the sense of Section 6 of Act No 359/1999 on the social and legal protection of children,²³ but also to potentially vulnerable children (for example due to social or health disadvantages). The strategy will strive for this target group to eliminate or significantly reduce the level of risk in the form of the concept of prevention programs and timely assistance to these children and their families.

Some of the proposed measures will also benefit people who cannot be considered children under the current legislation (people over the age of 18), but who require continued support from the social system (young adults leaving substitute care after coming of age coming from a dysfunctional family environment, etc.). This target group will primarily receive support in entering a fully independent life. Prosperity and an increase in the quality of life of children should be achieved through the systemic support of carers, especially parents or surrogate parents.

The structure of the proposal part of the Strategy and subsequent action plans

Measures of The National Strategy for the Protection of Children's Rights 2021–2029 are defined through a primary objective, six secondary objectives and individual measures to achieve these objectives. The measures include the relevant central state administration body (or another entity) responsible for its implementation and the estimated costs associated with its implementation. Further details will be included in **action plans** stemming from the Strategy. The first action plan will be developed for the period 2021–2024, the second for the period 2025–2029. The action plan for the first period will be submitted to the government for approval by the end of June 2021. By the end of 2024, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, in cooperation with the ministries concerned, will submit a report on the implementation of the National Strategy for the Protection of Children's Rights 2021–2029, which will be the basis for the second action plan 2025–2029 (expected to be approved by the Government in Q1 2025).

²³ That is, children, which are the focus of social and legal protection of children / those kept in the records of public child protection authorities.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE OF THE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS 2021–2029

The primary objective of the National Strategy for the Protection of Children's Rights 2021–2029 and subsequent action plans is a situation where:

“Children and young people in the Czech Republic live a quality life, grow up in a safe family environment and have equal opportunities, which they use to fully develop their potential.”

Ensuring this situation is the task for the system of protection of children's rights and care for vulnerable children, which by 2029 should look as follows:

- 1. It is fully focused on the child.**
- 2. It respects the needs and development of the child.**
- 3. It seeks the child's long-term interest, supports its uniqueness and development.**
- 4. It enables equal opportunities for all children, regardless of their gender, ability, race, ethnicity, disadvantage, social environment or age.**
- 5. It includes children and families in the solution of the situation, as well as their entire social environment.**
- 6. It builds on the strengths of children and identifies shortcomings in the environment that hinder the effective implementation of the rights of the child.**
- 7. It works in an integrated and collaborative manner with all stakeholders.**
- 8. It is a continuous and interactive process.**
- 9. It provides and reviews measures and services.**
- 10. It is based on objectively established facts and evidence.**

SECONDARY OBJECTIVES OF THE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS 2021–2029 AND HORIZONTAL PRINCIPLES

The primary objective of the Strategy will be achieved through the implementation of 6 secondary objectives. These objectives will help to maintain the direction of all activities across the entire system of support and protection of families and children. The set indicators of change, which will be defined in the action plans, are designed to measure the impact of the activities of both state bodies and non-governmental organizations that strive to meet these objectives.

Secondary objective 1: Approaches to ensuring and promoting the best interests of the child are aligned.

Secondary objective 2: Children are guaranteed safe care in a family environment.

Secondary objective 3: Actively ensuring equal opportunities for disadvantaged children

Secondary objective 4: Children are involved in decision-making processes that affect them.

Secondary objective 5: The quality of life of vulnerable children and families is improving.

Secondary objective 6: Developments in the field of protection of children's rights are continuously monitored, a system of data collection and evaluation of measures taken through a quality management system is set up.

Within the implementation of individual measures, it is necessary to respect the cross-sectional (horizontal) principles determining the nature of objectives and activities:

- The best interests of children are a paramount aspect of all decisions that affect them.
- All children have the right to grow up in a family environment where they are not at risk of neglect or abuse.

- Children and their families have the right to participate in decision-making processes that affect them.
- Ensuring the safety and all-round development of children is a national priority.
- The safety and well-being of children is primarily the responsibility of their families, which are supported both by their communities and by the self-governing and governmental levels.
- Czech society values parents, supports and cooperates with parents, families and everyone else so that they can take responsible care of their children.
- Children's rights are promoted by all systems and institutions.
- The measures taken and the interventions applied are implemented on the basis of expertly ascertained data and facts.

Detailed description of secondary objective 1 and proposed measures

Approaches to ensuring and promoting the best interests of the child are aligned.

The complexity of the system of protection of children's rights requires a coordinated and unified approach to solving the life situations of vulnerable children and families so as to guarantee that every child and family receives adequate support and assistance in a timely manner and of comparable quality. The common approach is based on the definition of the best interests of the child made by General Comment No 14 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child²⁴. The protection of children is not only of interest to authorities and institutions dealing with the "social and legal" protection of children, but of society as a whole. It is therefore necessary to raise public awareness of responsibility for children's rights and to lay down the agenda for the protection of children's rights as **national priority** shared across social groups, public administrations, etc. Unifying approaches to ensuring and promoting the best interests of the child will be achieved under the following conditions:

- There is a uniform legal environment governing the performance of public protection of children and the provision of services to vulnerable children and families.
- Uniform qualification and personality requirements for persons working with vulnerable children and families are defined and laid down in legislation.
- There is a functional system of professional support for the activities of workers in the field of work with children and young people.
- Social awareness of the responsibility for the protection of children's rights and the importance of these rights for society is systematically strengthened and awareness of the best interests of children is spread.

²⁴ General comment No. 14 (2013) on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration (art. 3, para. 1), the Czech translation is available in a publication of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs from 2016 *Convention on the Rights of the Child and related documents*. Available at: <https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/rlp/vybory/pro-prava-ditete/Preklady-dokumentu-OSN.pdf>.

- The quality of services provided and compliance with the basic principles (approaches) within the system of public administration bodies and an independent monitoring mechanism are monitored.

Sub-objective 1 “Unifying approaches”				
	Measure	Responsibility and deadline	Estimated costs	Change indicator
1.1.	Creation of new legislation on public protection of children and provision of services for vulnerable children	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA)	Existing resources of the ministry	Existence of uniform legislation
1.2.	Establishing uniform qualification conditions and creating an education system for people who work with the target group of vulnerable children and families	MoLSA, MEYS, MoH	Existing resources of the ministries	Enacting uniform qualification conditions
1.3.	Creating a system of professional support for the activities of social and other professionals	MoLSA, MEYS	Existing resources of the ministries	Legal regulation and methodical procedures of professional support
1.4.	Creation and implementation of a long-term communication strategy aimed at raising general awareness of the rights of the child among the general public and professional community	MoLSA, MEYS, MoH, cooperating actors: NGOs, service providers, public service media	Tens of millions of CZK ²⁵	Raising general awareness of the rights of the child verified by independent research
1.5.a	Establishment of an inter-ministerial team for the establishment of an independent monitoring mechanism in the field of protection of children’s rights, preparation of relevant legislation, specification and implementation of organizational measures	MoLSA, Mol, MEYS	CZK 30.5 million	Adoption of legislation enshrining the establishment of an independent monitoring mechanism
1.5.b	Activities of an independent monitoring mechanism in the field of protection of children’s rights	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA)	Tens of millions of CZK per year	Improving the quality of the system verified by independent research

²⁵ The National Strategy for the Protection of Children’s Rights 2021–2029 contains only a general quantification of the estimated costs. A more precise specification of costs will be made after the elaboration of individual activities in action plans following from the Strategy.

Detailed description of secondary objective 2 and proposed measures

Children are guaranteed safe care in a family environment

Article 9(1) of the Convention provides for the right of children to grow up in the care of their own parents, unless the separation of the child from the family is necessary in the best interests of the child (for example, if the child is abused or neglected or if the parents live separately and it is necessary to decide on the place of residence of the child). Insufficient housing conditions or property conditions of the child's parents or persons entrusted with the care of the child cannot in themselves be a reason for removing the child from the natural family environment. Children also have the right to services and support that will enable them to succeed in adulthood. The most effective way to protect children from abuse and neglect is prevention. If adequate services are provided to vulnerable families at the right time, child neglect and trauma can be prevented. At the same time, it is important to educate the general public about the needs of children and their fulfilment (including work on attitudes, prejudices, etc.). In cases of forced departure of a child from her own family, substitute family care should be used primarily. Family reintegration (unless it is not in the best interests of the child) should be the main goal in the case of removing a child from parental care. Fulfilling the above obligations and ensuring safe care for children in a family environment is possible under the following conditions:

- There is a comprehensive preventive, counselling and support system that strengthens parental competencies and creates the conditions for children to live in a safe environment in families that support their all-round development.
- There is a system of timely support and assistance (intervention) in cases of endangerment of children guaranteed by public administration bodies and working in cooperation with the public and non-state sector. There is a system of effective assistance to parents in the case of forced departure of a child from the family, aimed at ensuring the conditions for the safe return of the child.
- Risk factors leading to child abuse and neglect are identified and measures are implemented to eliminate these risk factors.
- New methods of work and services responding to new forms of danger to children (cyberbullying, new forms of addiction, etc.) are being introduced.

- Sufficient capacities of professional services are provided for children who have become victims of sexual abuse, exploitation of children or other criminal offences.
- Reintegration of the family (while respecting the best interests of the child) is laid down as a basic principle and goal of all provided services and interventions in the event of the child leaving the care of his or her own parents.
- There is a developed system of substitute family care for dealing with situations of children who, for various reasons, cannot grow up in their own families.
- Institutional care for children is adapted to the needs of children, the capacity of facilities is reduced, the number of children in residential forms of services is reduced and the period of provision of these services is shortened. There is a minimum age limit for the use of residential forms of services in resolving the situation of a vulnerable child.

Secondary objective 2: “Safe care in a family environment”				
	Measure	Responsibility and deadline	Estimated costs	Change indicator
2.1.	Definition of a minimum network of preventive and counselling services and other support activities for vulnerable children and families, setting up a financial mechanism for financing this network	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) MEYS	Hundreds of millions of CZK per year	Functional minimum network of preventive and counselling services
2.2.a	Creating a system of timely support and assistance to children and families in risky situations	MoLSA, MoH, Mol, MEYS, MJ	Hundreds of millions of CZK	Functional system of timely support and assistance
2.2.b	Within the minimum network of services, services are set aside to support parents whose child has been removed from care for the purpose of safe reintegration of the family.	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA)	Tens of millions of CZK	Functional minimum network to support family reintegration
2.3.	Implementation of educational activities (based on a communication plan) in the field of positive parenting and reduction of social tolerance for child abuse and neglect	MoLSA, MoH, Mol, MEYS	Tens of millions of CZK	Implemented awareness-raising activities, evaluation of their impacts
2.4.	Definition of risk factors that lead to child abuse and neglect.	MoLSA, MoH, Mol, MEYS	Existing resources of the ministries	Prepared interdisciplinary methodology
2.5.	Elaboration of methodologies and working procedures related to new forms	MoLSA,	Existing resources	Prepared interdisciplinary

	of dangers to children and families	MEYS, MoI	of the ministries	methodology
2.6.	Establishing a minimum network of specialized services to provide professional assistance to children who have been maltreated, sexually abused or exploited	MoLSA, MoH, MEYS, MoJ	Tens of millions of CZK per year	Functional minimum network of preventive and counselling services
2.7.	Enacting family reintegration (while respecting the best interests of the child) as a basic principle and objective of all provided services and interventions in the event of the child leaving the care of his or her own parents	MoLSA, MEYS	Existing resources of the ministries	Amended legal regulation of public protection of children and services for vulnerable children
2.8.	Development of a system of substitute family care for solving situations of children who, for various reasons, cannot grow up in their own family, redefinition of foster care by relatives, specialization of foster care, introduction of substitute care performed on a professional basis	MoLSA, MoJ	Hundreds of millions of CZK per year	Amended legal regulation of substitute family care
2.8.a	Implementation of educational activities to support substitute family care	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA)	Tens of millions of CZK	Implemented awareness-raising activities, evaluation of their impacts
2.9.	Transformation of residential facilities for children, new legislation on the provision of residential services for children	MoLSA, MEYS, MoH, MoJ	Hundreds of millions of CZK	New legislation on the activities of residential services for children, existing network of transformed services

Detailed description of secondary objective 3 and proposed measures

Ensuring equal opportunities for disadvantaged children

Special attention should be paid to children with different types of disabilities. With the accession to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities²⁶ the Czech Republic has undertaken to take all appropriate measures, including legislative measures, to amend or repeal existing laws, regulations, customs and practices that are a source of discrimination against persons with disabilities (whether direct or indirect).²⁷ These include ensuring the right of children to live in a family environment, access to education, an adequate standard of living and social protection, etc. Another important target group is socially disadvantaged children. Disadvantage of children has its origin in families and their abilities of and conditions for childcare. The main risk factors include social exclusion, unstable housing (homelessness or the threat of homelessness), parental alcohol and non-alcoholic addictions, parental psychiatric illness, trauma related to inappropriate care in the families of existing parents. Maintaining ties with each child's family, community and cultural background is the basis of a system that fully respects the differences of each family and the needs of their members. At the same time, however, it is crucial that the system focuses on areas where there are recurrent or deepening social issues and disadvantages for children. Achieving the goal of ensuring equal opportunities for disadvantaged children is possible under the following conditions:

- The needs of disadvantaged children form the basis for planning strategies, concepts and legislation that address their issues.
- Disadvantaged children and their families receive the necessary support so that everyone can be part of the usual structures of education, health care, employment and social and other services.

²⁶ Communication of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs No 10/2010 Sb. m.s.

²⁷ See Section 2 and Section 3 of Act No 198/2009 on equal treatment and legal means of protection against discrimination and amending certain acts (Anti-Discrimination Act). Indirect discrimination is defined as an act or omission whereby, on the basis of a seemingly neutral provision, criterion or practice, a person is disadvantaged in comparison with others.

- Within the minimum network of services, the necessary capacities are allocated for support and assistance to children and families with disabilities.
- Information is made available to disadvantaged children and their families in a form that meets the needs of the target group.
- Campaigns are initiated and supported to help raise awareness of disadvantage issues and the need to equalize opportunities.

Secondary objective 3 “Ensuring equal opportunities”				
	Measure	Responsibility and deadline	Estimated costs	Change indicator
3.1.	Establishing the obligation to take into account the needs of disadvantaged children in the preparation of strategies and legislation (monitoring of impacts in the assessment of direct and indirect discrimination)	All participating ministries	Existing resources of the ministries	Government resolution, evaluation of progress
3.2.a	Implementation of educational programmes for the professional community in the field of work with disadvantaged children (planning and implementation of measures against direct and indirect discrimination of disadvantaged children)	MoLSA, MEYS, MoH	Existing resources of the ministries	Implemented programs, including impact evaluation
3.2.b	Defining risk factors in families that lead to the disadvantage of children, introducing tools for identifying risk factors in families and their evaluation	MoLSA, MEYS	Existing resources of the ministries	Prepared methodological material including processes (tools)
3.3.	Determining the capacity of professional services for disadvantaged children and families within the minimum network of services, setting up a financial mechanism for financing these services	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA)	Tens of millions of CZK per year	Functional network of professional services
3.4.	Elaboration of methodology and implementation of follow-up educational programmes focused on communication with children with disabilities and their families	MoLSA, MEYS, MoH	Existing resources of the ministries	Prepared methodology and implemented educational programmes, including impact evaluation
3.5.	Implementation of an awareness campaign concerning child disadvantage, the need for and ways of equalizing opportunities	MoLSA, MEYS, MoH	Tens of millions of CZK	Implemented awareness-raising activities, evaluation of their impacts

Detailed description of secondary objective 4 and proposed measures

Children are involved in decision-making processes

Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees children who are able to formulate their views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them, and due attention must be paid to the views of the child. Involving children in decision-making processes is part of a modern approach to protecting children's rights. This issue is particularly important in areas such as court and administrative proceedings involving children, juvenile court proceedings, divorce or legal separation proceedings, and the process of raising a child or young person outside one's own family. Adults who communicate with children need preparation, skills and support to be able to effectively support children's involvement. Fulfilling the goal, where children are effectively involved in decision-making processes, is possible under the following conditions:

- Children are provided with complete and comprehensible information respecting their age and intellectual maturity about their right to free expression of opinions, the possibilities of exercising this right in decision-making processes, the extent of their participation, how their expressions will be handled, etc.
- The environment and ways of communication are adapted to the needs of children. Adequate time and resources must be set aside to ensure that children are well prepared for communication, have the confidence and have the opportunity to express their views. It is ensured that children's participation in decision-making processes is based on the principles of social inclusion and avoids existing discriminatory stereotypes.
- Adults who communicate with children have comprehensive education available to acquire the necessary skills and subsequent methodological support to be able to effectively support children's involvement.
- Within society, information is disseminated about the importance of involving children in decision-making processes and respect for the child's opinion.

Secondary objective 4 “Involving children”				
	Measure	Responsibility and deadline	Estimated costs	Change indicator
4 January	Creation of information materials (printed, on-line versions) for children regarding the possibilities and procedures of applying their opinion in decision-making (adaptation to different age groups, children with disabilities)	MoLSA, MEYS, MoJ, MoH	CZK millions	Created and distributed information materials
4.2.	Definition of technical and organizational measures to create an environment friendly to the involvement of children in key areas of children’s lives (education, health and social care, administrative and judicial) and their subsequent implementation	MoLSA, MEYS, MoJ, MoH	Tens of millions of CZK	Removal of technical and organizational barriers to child involvement
4.3.a	Development of techniques for ascertaining the opinion of children in administrative proceedings and court proceedings	MoLSA, MEYS, MoJ	Existing resources of the ministries	Prepared methodologies and tools
4.3.b	Implementation of educational activities for the professional community to acquire the necessary skills in the field of communication with children and the involvement of children in decision-making processes	MoLSA, MEYS, MoJ	Existing resources of the ministries	Implemented programs, including impact evaluation
4.4.	Implementation of an awareness campaign to support the consideration of children’s views “I want to be heard” based on a previous study of society’s attitudes and a developed communication plan	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA)	Tens of millions of CZK	Implemented awareness-raising activities, evaluation of their impacts

Detailed description of secondary objective 5 and proposed measures

The quality of life of vulnerable children and families is improving.

Improving the quality of life of vulnerable children and their families is, in addition to primary protection, another task of the social system. On the one hand, it is about reducing the risk of poverty, loss of housing, loss of employment of parents, etc. of this target group. It is also about creating an adequate life perspective for adolescents and young adults in the period of their independence. Objective 5 is an open objective, which will be implemented through activities resulting from other related planning documents (affordable housing, combating social exclusion, etc.). It is also related to the setting up of the social assistance system (benefit, tax and insurance systems) and the applicable legislation. Within the provided services and interventions, it is necessary to move to their evaluation in terms of quality of life of the target group and to correct the existing systems on the basis of the findings. Achieving the goal of improving the quality of life of vulnerable children and their families is possible under the following conditions:

- Factors significantly influencing the quality of life are defined, these factors are evaluated within the existing systems of services and social assistance.
- The availability of services and other forms of assistance to vulnerable families is ensured; these activities are provided in a “low-threshold” manner, i.e. they are involved in the normal community environment (schools, health care providers, leisure activities, etc.). In the Czech Republic, this requires the establishment of cooperation between community entities, service providers and other entities responsible for social assistance.
- There is a system of affordable housing, a system of assistance for people at risk of poverty, debt, job loss and other factors that negatively affect the lives of families with children; there are measures against the removal of children from families in the area of prevention, financial support, emergency housing, etc.
- Existing benefit, tax and insurance systems are set up to support the care of children in families.

- There is a system of support for young adults in their entry into independent life; this system focuses primarily on young people leaving alternative forms of care or dysfunctional family environment.
- The function and capacity of the system of services is set according to the needs of children and families; the right to assistance is guaranteed and there is sustainable and transparent financing of the system of care for vulnerable children and their families.

Secondary objective 5 “Improving the quality of life”				
	Measure	Responsibility and deadline	Estimated costs	Change indicator
5.1.a	Research focused on the definition of factors influencing the quality of life of vulnerable children and their families	MoLSA	CZK hundreds of thousands	Research report
5.1.b	Elaboration of a methodology focused on the procedures of evaluation of services and interventions in terms of the impact on the quality of life of children and their families	MoLSA, MEYS, MoH	Existing resources of the ministries	Elaborated methodology, evaluation of its impacts
5.2.	Implementation of cooperation systems and organizational measures to increase the availability of professional services for vulnerable children and their families by engaging them in a normal community environment	MoLSA, MEYS, MoH	Existing resources of the ministries	Created cooperation systems and implemented measures
5.3.a	Definition of the system of assistance in the area of affordable housing, financial assistance, etc. focused on the target group of vulnerable children (basis for related strategies and changes in legislation)	MoRD, MoLSA	Existing resources of the ministries	Defined system including proposal of measures
5.3.b.	Definition of the system (measures) in the field of housing, material assistance, etc. for the prevention of the removal of children from parental care (basis for related strategies and changes in legislation)	MoLSA	Existing resources of the ministries	Defined system including proposal of measures
5.4.	Setting up a system of support for young adults in their entry into independent life, including relevant changes in legislation	MoLSA, MEYS	Tens of millions of CZK	Functional system of support for young adults
5.5.	Within the minimum network of services, specification of the method of guaranteeing the right to the provision of assistance, including the setting up of a sustainable financing system	MoLSA, MF	Existing resources of the ministries	Definition of guaranteeing rights and financing system, incl. proposed measures

5. 6.	Elaboration of a methodology focused on implementation of leisure activities for children from disadvantaged environment	MK, MEYS	Existing resources of the ministries	Methodology of recommending activities and their possible realisation.
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Detailed description of secondary objective 6 and proposed measures

Creation of a system of data collection and evaluation of measures taken in the field of protection of children's rights through a quality management system

The functionality of the system of child protection and care for vulnerable children depends on the quality of decision-making processes at all levels. These decision-making processes must stem from evidence-based practice. The results of the system must be evaluated not only by internal control mechanisms and quality management methods, but also by independent mechanisms in order to achieve maximum objectivity of this evaluation. These results are mainly the impacts of the activities on the relevant target groups. Achieving the goal is possible under the following conditions:

- Modern methods of quality management at the level of case work, individual subjects and the system as a whole are introduced.
- The effectiveness of the system and individual activities is evaluated through impacts on target groups; the evaluation is based on evidence (measurable data proving the degree of fulfilment of the relevant indicator). Information on immediate, medium-term and long-term results is collected (i.e. planning is structured, inadequate responses to individual shortcomings are eliminated, etc.). The necessary measures are taken at all levels of quality management (case work, processes in organizations, local, regional or national social policy).
- All relevant actors (workers at all levels, children and families) are involved in the evaluation.
- A strategy for the emergence of new types of services in the child protection system is determined. At the same time, the principle of subsidiarity of public sector activities is respected.
- Indicators are set for the collection, analysis and evaluation of information in the child protection system, in particular the data needed to evaluate the results of the system, the definition of risk factors, etc. (including a review of the effectiveness of existing reporting).

- A unified information system for the protection of children has been created (the administrator of this system is the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs), which enables the collection and monitoring of data. Based on this data, the system is kept updated.

Secondary objective 6 “Data collection and quality management”				
	Measure	Responsibility and deadline	Estimated costs	Change indicator
6.1.	Creating a unified quality management system of services for vulnerable children and families, selection and recommendation of quality management methods	MoLSA, Mol, MEYS	Tens of millions of CZK	Existing system, impact evaluation
6.2.	Elaboration of methodologies for evaluation of activities through impacts on target groups and procedures in taking measures at all levels of quality management	MoLSA	CZK hundreds of thousands	Elaborated methodologies, evaluation of their impact
6.3.	Elaboration of methodologies for the involvement of all relevant actors in the quality management system	MoLSA	CZK hundreds of thousands	Elaborated methodologies, evaluation of their impact
6.4.	Creating a strategy for the implementation of innovative services and a follow-up programme to support their creation	MoLSA, MEYS	Tens of millions of CZK	Elaborated strategy, newly created innovative services (including their evaluation)
6.5.	Determination of indicators for the collection, analysis and evaluation of information in the child protection system	MoLSA, CZSO, OPDP	Existing resources of the ministries	Determination of indicators and their verification in practice
6.6.	Creation of a unified information system for child protection enabling data collection and monitoring	MoLSA	Hundreds of millions of CZK	Existing information system

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- National Strategy for the Development of Social Services 2016–2025
- Action Plan for the Prevention of Domestic and Gender-Based Violence 2019–2022
- National Action Plan for Mental Health 2020–2030
- Long-Term Plan for Education and Development of the Education System in the Czech Republic 2019–2023
- Family Policy Strategy 2017
- Social Housing Strategy 2015–2025
- National Strategy for Primary Prevention of Risk Behaviour of Children and Youth 2019–2027
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- Health 2020;

Upcoming government strategies

- Action plan for the transition from institutional care to community support with the help of field, outpatient and residential community-type social services 2019–2021
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