



Civil society monitoring report  
on implementation  
of the national Roma integration strategy  
*in the Czech Republic*

*Identifying blind spots  
in Roma inclusion policy*

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Although the Roma Civil Monitor pilot project, as part of which the report was prepared, is coordinated by CEU, the report represents the findings of the author and it does not necessarily reflect the views of CEU. CEU cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASI	Agency for Social Inclusion
CASEL	Coordinated Approach to Socially Excluded Localities
CLLD	Community-Led Local Development
Coordinator	Regional Coordinator for Roma Affairs
Council	Government Council for Roma Affairs
Department	Department of Human Rights and Minority Affairs
DG	Directorate General
EEA	European Economic Area
ESIF	European Structural Funds
EUFW	EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies
LAG	Local Action Group
LFS	Labour Market and Labour Force Survey
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRCP	National Roma Contact Point
NRIS	National Roma Integration Strategy
Office	Office of the Government Council for Roma Affairs
OP	Operational Programme
RCM	Roma Civil Monitor
SILC	Statistics on Income and Living Conditions

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the adoption of the Czech Republic's current National Roma Integration Strategy (NRIS), no distinct improvement has been achieved in the field of Roma inclusion. The NRIS being a complex, detailed document, the assumption therefore is that the issues hindering progress lie in its implementation mechanisms. Not enough effort has been put into enabling Roma political participation, no effective coordination mechanisms have been set up to ensure inter-ministerial implementation of the NRIS, and no sustained activities to secure its local-level implementation occurred. The lesson for those drafting the new version of the NRIS should be drawn from the current implementation deficits, and attention should be focused in this direction to guarantee that more pronounced advancement will be inspired by the upcoming NRIS.

### Roma civil society empowerment, leadership and participation

No significant action has been taken with respect to the goals in the NRIS on Roma participation in political and public affairs throughout the implementation period, and therefore no improvement in this area has occurred. The number of elected officials of Roma origin is periodically monitored, but no follow-up activity to enhance the political representation of Roma has been realised. The Committees on National Minorities that exist throughout the country are just formal advisory boards functioning on the regional and local level: while they can serve as a platform for discussion and cooperation, they do not actively work towards a more significant participative governance by any of the national minorities they serve. The issue of low voter turnout in Roma communities is not reflected in public policy even though it is one of the biggest issues hindering the increase in Roma political participation.

#### *The Government Council for Roma Affairs*

The Government Council for Roma Affairs (Council) is not a participative, nor a representative body of the Roma minority. It is, as stated in its statute, an expert advisory body of the Government. It is currently the only platform of communication between the government and Roma civil society. While the Prime Minister is the chair of the Council, this has not translated yet into direct actions by the government as a result. At the same time, such an institutional set-up risks becoming a drawback, as particular ministries do not necessarily take up the agenda of Roma inclusion as "their own" but consider it something that the Office of the Government should deal with. The functioning of the Council depends very much on unremunerated work by its civil society members and on the commitment of its under-staffed secretariat. In 2019, a new statute for the Council was approved and the number of Council meetings was reduced from four to two a year.

#### *Government subsidies for NGOs*

The ministries of culture and education and the Office of the Government administer subsidies explicitly targeting Roma. While all of these subsidies could theoretically enhance Roma participation, none is doing so in an explicit, systematic way. The financing of NGOs active in Roma social inclusion is also generally not appropriately secured. The system of enrolment in the so-called Regional Basic Network of Social Services, which is a prerequisite for NGOs to receive funding through Regional Authorities, is perceived as an important barrier by service providers. NGO activities other than social service provision are even harder to finance. In general, small local organisations have restricted access to financing and lack support. This demonstrates that Roma inclusion is simply not a priority of the Czech government. Most of the money from state subsidies that is distributed to NGOs is directed to the area of sport, without requiring any inclusive measures as a condition of funding.

## Policy coordination and integrated approaches

The NRIS should be the government document enabling an integrated approach to Roma inclusion, and the National Roma Contact Point (NRCP) the coordinating centre in that matter. The Office of the Government Council for Roma Affairs (Office) should be fulfilling the NRCP position but does not have the appropriate budget or capacity for this at the moment. The capacity of the Office and its position directly affect the status of the NRIS among other strategic government documents and the possibilities of its effective implementation. The disadvantage of an inter-ministerial document such as the NRIS lies in the fact that without an inter-ministerial coordination mechanism providing for regular, systematic reporting and internal accountability, the ministries somehow forget about their duties in this regard. The upcoming NRIS is currently being prepared by the Office without any broader, systematic consultations or coordination with any other nascent strategic documents.

### *Roma targeting and mainstreaming*

Given all of the barriers currently in place that preclude the effective implementation of the NRIS and given the fact that social exclusion is still the biggest Roma-related issue in public policy, questions about the most effective ways of reaching Roma tend to resurge. The non-existence of reliable data disaggregated by ethnicity continues to hinder evaluation of public policies' impact on Roma and the specific barriers they face. Concerns remain that Roma are not benefiting proportionally from mainstream policies and therefore, some call for a more targeted approach. Others plead for not mentioning Roma explicitly as beneficiaries of mainstream policy, arguing that focusing the discourse on social inclusion as such will enable inclusion in environments otherwise hostile to Roma. However, if Roma are to benefit from any policy, there has to be a pronounced emphasis on ensuring equal opportunities and on fighting discrimination and segregation, which is currently not the case in the Czech Republic.

### Roma inclusion at the local level

The NRIS acknowledges that its goals cannot be implemented without cooperating with local-level public authorities. The only systematic measures used to engage local and regional authorities are the positions of Regional Coordinators for Roma Affairs and Roma advisors with the municipalities. The NRIS itself is binding only on the central government bodies. Regional and municipal governments enjoy a significant autonomy in the Czech Republic and take action when they feel their autonomy is threatened. Moreover, many municipalities are engaged in exclusionary, segregating acts that go against the purpose of the NRIS. It must be mentioned, on the other hand, that the number of municipalities implementing social inclusion policies has been continually growing over the past decade. Political will, however, is a very important factor in local decision-making, and this also means mechanisms put forward by one local administration can be stopped by a newly elected one. The Czech government's Agency for Social Inclusion (ASI) has been the most important vehicle of social inclusion on the local level since its establishment. However, because its own operation is project-based and not systematically financed from the state budget, it cannot cover the state's entire territory and its focus depends on implemented projects. An important question is who in the Czech Republic could perform the role of reminding local policymakers more systematically of the human rights dimension of the problems Roma face.

Ultimately, it is the more active political participation of the Roma, including their higher turnout in elections, that could enhance Roma inclusion on the local level, in all its dimensions.

## INTRODUCTION

The EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (EUFW), which has set prerequisites for the Czech National Roma Integration Strategy (NRIS), has been mainly important in making the agenda of Roma inclusion more visible in the public policy area. Due to the NRIS, mechanisms to monitor particular ministries' progress in realising Roma inclusion measures have been elaborated, thus reminding the ministries of their obligations. However, no distinct improvement has been achieved in Roma inclusion (as documented in [RCM's previous two reports](#)).<sup>1</sup> The NRIS being a complex and detailed document, the assumption therefore is that the issues hindering progress lie in its implementation.

The Czech RCM coalition has identified three main topics which are crucial for more pronounced progress in the implementation of Roma inclusion policies that are currently not being treated with the attention they deserve.

The first is **Roma political participation**, without which the issues Roma face cannot be properly defined and gain enough attention from the public authorities. The need for higher participation has been stated both in the NRIS and in the authors' recently conducted interviews with public stakeholders, but the lack of participation-enhancing mechanisms persists. The authors of this report believe that the one holding more power should actively support the voice of the less powerful, which is not the case yet.

Securing continuous funding for their activities is one of the main concerns of Roma NGOs. Having secured funding for day-to-day activities would leave space for more public engagement by civil society representatives. Moreover, funding opportunities focusing on increasing Roma participation would help further development in this area.

The second topic of this report deals with **coordination of Roma inclusion policies**, as weaknesses of the current coordination mechanisms were identified as one of the main reasons for slow progress in Roma inclusion. The authorities responsible for coordination of the NRIS currently are in a weak position compared to other public authorities, and their workforce is not properly secured given the scope of their agenda. If more pronounced advancement should be made, then coordination mechanisms and particular responsibilities should be given more attention by the forthcoming NRIS.

The third issue identified by the coalition is the **implementation of Roma inclusion policies on the local level**. Though the NRIS is binding only on the central government bodies, without action taken on the local level no significant improvement in the situation of Roma can be made. The local and regional governments enjoy significant autonomy, but the central government can nevertheless take steps to promote more pronounced progress locally and regionally.

The report was prepared by a coalition of NGOs who have mutually consulted the content throughout its preparation. Most of the information presented comes from the coalition members' experience and knowledge. Interviews were conducted with stakeholders, and additional, publicly accessible information such as amounts of state funding for NGOs was used to illustrate the authors' arguments.

<sup>1</sup> The first annual cycle of the Roma Civil Monitor was focused on the horizontal precondition of the Roma inclusion – governance, fight against antigypsyism and anti-discrimination. The second cycle concerned the four key policy fields – education, employment, healthcare and housing. All reports are available at: <https://cps.ceu.edu/roma-civil-monitor-reports>

## ROMA CIVIL SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT, LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION

Political participation of Roma in the Czech Republic has long been low (for more details, please see [the first RCM report on the Czech Republic](#)). Participation of Roma civil society in public affairs and their engagement by public authorities in issues of their concern is marginal. The civil servants with whom interviews were done for the purpose of this report acknowledge the low level of Roma participation and the importance of its increase for the success of Roma inclusion policies, but they expect proactivity from the part of civil society. At the same time, civil society representatives often do not find forums where they could meaningfully express their concerns, and they do not see follow-ups being matched to their demands. Trying to be heard is time-consuming work for which the civil society representatives are not easily finding funding.

### NRIS and participation

The current NRIS in the Czech Republic has acknowledged the lack of state support in the area of Roma civil society participation and has set goals to strengthen the involvement of Roma in political and public affairs. However, no significant action has been taken with respect to these goals throughout the implementation period, and therefore no major improvement has occurred.

The related goals set in the NRIS were:

- *"To monitor the representation of Roma in legislative, executive and advisory positions and continuously encourage ... higher representation of Roma in the public authorities' executive positions"* (specific goal 13.1.);

- *"Support capacity building of Roma civil society in order for them to be able to meaningfully engage in dialogue and in creating, realizing and monitoring processes of Roma integration"* (specific goal 13.2).

The number of elected officials of Roma origin is periodically monitored by the Office; as of 2017, only 13 Roma were holding elected office, all of them at local level. No follow-up activity to enhance the political representation of Roma has been realised.

In the framework of goal 13.1, the number of Committees on National Minorities has been counted as an indicator. These are formal advisory boards functioning on the regional and local level. While they can serve as a platform for discussion and cooperation, they do not actively work towards more significant participative governance either locally or regionally. However, the mere existence of such committees is considered a participatory measure by the central authorities.<sup>2</sup>

Goal 13.2 is reported as being implemented through the funding made available for NGOs through the subsidies programmes administered by the Office and its relevant information meetings for applicants, as well as through the functioning of the Council (for further elaboration on both, see below).

The Office ran projects called "Activation and empowerment of Roma actors through the National Roma Platform" in 2016, 2017 and 2018 that were financed from DG Justice's Action Grants. These projects should have incentivised Roma participation in the process of NRIS implementation. However, the experiences of participants in the project suggest

<sup>2</sup> For more details see *Information on the Implementation of the Roma Integration Strategy for 2020 in 2018*.

its activities were primarily of an informational, one-way character.<sup>3</sup> The Office did not apply for continuation of the project, reportedly because of its own lack of capacity.<sup>4</sup> A call for NGOs in the framework of the EEA and Norway Grants administered by the Czech Ministry of Finances is planned as a continuation of these activities, and the content of that call was prepared by the Office.

The issue of low voter turnout in Roma communities is not reflected in public policy even though it is one of the issues hindering increased Roma political participation.<sup>5</sup>

## Government Council for Roma Affairs

The Council is often mentioned when participation by Roma civil society in public policy issues is brought up with decision-makers. However, the Council is not a participative, nor representative body of the Roma minority. Nonetheless, this is an important body, as representatives of Roma civil society are part of the Council and it is currently the only platform of communication between the government and Roma civil society.

It is, as stated in its statute, an expert advisory body of the government.<sup>6</sup> Its civil society members can be nominated by civil society (and are mostly nominated by the active civil society members of the Council), but they are officially chosen by the Council's chair and appointed by the government. The nomination process is managed by the Council's Office. The Office publishes a call for candidates on its webpage and chooses, together with the current Council members, the best applicants from their point of view, who are then approved by the government.

The Council is part of a system of government advisory bodies in the area of human rights protection currently chaired by the Prime Minister. The first vice-chair of each advisory body is the Czech Government Human Rights Commissioner, and each such advisory body has a second vice-chair appointed from among its civil society members (the basic functioning of the Council was described in [the first RCM report on the Czech Republic](#)).

The direct relationship of the Council to the government, embodied by having the Prime Minister as its chair, could be advantageous if effectively explored. When a Prime Minister is willing to act, then a lot can be initiated - for instance, policy proposals can get to cabinet meetings directly and avoid a lengthy intra-ministerial process. The Council's inter-ministerial position means in theory that an integrated approach among the ministries could be taken on various issues. At the same time, such an institutional set-up can become a pitfall, as it means that particular ministries do not necessarily take up the agenda of Roma inclusion as "their own" but consider it something that the Office should deal with. This situation is not unique to the Council, though; all the other government advisory bodies related to human rights and national minorities' affairs suffer from similar lack of ministerial involvement. An interesting institutional step has been taken in the area of gender equality by creating the positions of gender equality coordinators at each ministry, the so-called "gender focal points".<sup>7</sup>

The agenda of the Council is abstract and broad; its aim is to "systematically work towards integration of Roma into society in all aspects of life". A promising step was made recently

<sup>3</sup> As based on interviews and on experience of representatives of the NGOs involved in the Czech RCM coalition.

<sup>4</sup> As stated by the Office representatives during an in-person interview on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

<sup>5</sup> For more details, see below in the chapter on local level public policies.

<sup>6</sup> Available at: <https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/zalezitosti-romske-komunity/5c--Statut-Rady-vlady-pro-zalezitosti-romske-mensiny.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Position established in 2001; for more details see: [https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/rovne-prilezitosti-zen-a-muzu/Projekt\\_OPZ/Vystupy\\_projektu/Standard-pozice-rezortnich-koordinatorek-a-koordinatoru-rovnosti-zen-a-muzu.pdf](https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/rovne-prilezitosti-zen-a-muzu/Projekt_OPZ/Vystupy_projektu/Standard-pozice-rezortnich-koordinatorek-a-koordinatoru-rovnosti-zen-a-muzu.pdf).

when, based on a civil society members' initiative, the full Council approved its priorities for the 2020-2024 period.<sup>8</sup>

The Council does not have particularly significant powers. It proposes motions and positions, and while it can theoretically impose tasks upon the state authorities, the government does not always transfer those Council propositions into policies, and the ministries often ignore its recommendations, resolutions and even the concrete tasks imposed upon them. This is an issue for all the human rights and national minorities' affairs Councils. The Council also approves (or rejects, as its civil society members did last year)<sup>9</sup> the text of the Government's "Annual Report on the State of the Roma Minority in the Czech Republic". This year the Annual Report was approved by the Council after an agreement was made that the civil society members will be engaged in the future methodology for drafting the next report and have been given the opportunity to comment on the report.

The Council establishes committees and working groups which deal mostly with issues related to social exclusion. Only its Working Group on Education has been functioning consistently for a longer time. The Monitoring Committee for the ASI has also been meeting regularly, but its agenda is predominantly about formally approving municipalities' applications and the reporting by the ASI. A Committee on NRIS Implementation was created this year, and both the Council civil society members and the representatives of the Office perceive this to be a potentially effective measure for ensuring future NRIS implementation. Its members represent administration units responsible for particular NRIS measures and should meet quarterly.<sup>10</sup>

The functioning of the Council depends very much on unremunerated work by its civil society members, who engage in preparing the programme of the Council meetings, propose most of the resolutions, chair the Council's committees and working groups, and produce background materials. Their prestige is low (both amongst the government and the Roma public).<sup>11</sup> There is a high level of fluctuation in the ranks of the civil society members; e.g., during 2019 three civil society members resigned for reasons varying from disagreement with the chair or with the other members to lack of personal capacity.<sup>12</sup> Besides unpaid work and low prestige, other reasons are a lack of expert backup (which should be provided by the Office) and the fact that membership is very time-consuming. To date, the selection of the civil society members has been based on the model of "personalities", not necessarily on the level of members' expertise in a particular topic; while this may have been functional previously, it is currently proving to be ineffective as the issues and tasks dealt with have become of a more policy-oriented nature. The current civil society members and Office representatives are aware of the limitations of the

<sup>8</sup> Available at: [https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/zalezitosti-romske-komunity/Jednani\\_Rady/Priority-RVZRM-final.pdf](https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/zalezitosti-romske-komunity/Jednani_Rady/Priority-RVZRM-final.pdf) and <https://www.vlada.cz/cz/ppov/zalezitosti-romske-komunity/aktuality/rada-vlady-pro-zalezitosti-romske-mensiny-projednala-priority-na-leta-2020--2024-177179/>

<sup>9</sup> More information available at: <http://www.romea.cz/cz/zpravodajstvi/domaci/zasedani-romske-rady-poprve-vedl-andrej-babis-clenove-pozaduji-vetsi-zapojeni-romu-a-opusteni-paternalistickeho-pristupu>

<sup>10</sup> For the Committee's statute, see: <https://www.vlada.cz/cz/ppov/zalezitosti-romske-komunity/dokumenty/hlasovani-o-schvaleni-statutu-vyboru-pro-naplnovani-strategie-romske-integrace-176629/>

<sup>11</sup> Members complain about lack of appreciation and misunderstanding of their work from within the Roma community and about not being taken seriously by their ministerial counterparts.

<sup>12</sup> More information available at: <http://www.romea.cz/cz/zpravodajstvi/domaci/jan-balog-rezignoval-na-clenstvi-v-rade-vlady-pro-zalezitosti-romske-mensiny>, <http://www.romea.cz/cz/zpravodajstvi/martina-horvathova-spoluprace-s-andrejem-babisem-se-neslucuje-s-mymi-moralnimi-zasadami-odchazim-z-romske-rady-vlady>

previous criteria for choosing civil society members and are promising to make changes that will result in professionalising the Council.<sup>13</sup>

The Council's operational capacity depends very much on the work of its secretariat – the Office (more information to be found below), which is meant to organise meetings and prepare background information for the Council members (in addition to other parts of their agenda). The secretariat itself is currently suffering from a lack of capacity and financing (in addition to lacking money to pay civil society members for their work or to commission analyses from experts).

In 2019, a new statute for the Council was approved;<sup>14</sup> the same organisational changes were approved for all the government advisory bodies involved in human rights protection. The number of Council meetings was reduced from four times a year to twice a year; apparently because of lack of time of the Councils' chair, the Prime Minister.<sup>15</sup> Another change brought about by the amendment of the statute is that the head of the Department of Human Rights and Minority Affairs (Department), which is an administrative position, gained further competencies relative to the work of the councils. The change in the number of Council meetings suggests that no increased attention to the issue of Roma inclusion can be expected from the current Czech government (all the more so given recent staff cuts to the Department).<sup>16</sup>

## State financial support of NGOs

Securing continuous funding for their activities is, in the long run, one of the main concerns for Roma NGOs. Private foundations do not do much giving in the area of Roma inclusion, and if they do, it is mostly through scholarship programmes (described [in the second RCM report on the Czech Republic](#)). Private companies do not usually support activities targeting groups for whom there is little empathy, which is exactly the case of the Roma minority in the Czech Republic.<sup>17</sup> The same applies to contributions from the general public. Private contributions in this area being insignificant, NGOs rely mostly on state funding.

The financing of NGOs active in Roma inclusion is generally perceived by the NGOs as not appropriately secured given the scope of the issues dealt with. Mainly service-providing NGOs are active in this area, and few can be considered Roma organisations in terms of their establishers or management. The NGOs are not providing services exclusively to Roma, but to all people endangered by social exclusion in general, a significant percentage of whom are of Roma origin (as discussed in the [previous RCM reports on the Czech Republic](#)). Finances for social services are mainly distributed through the Regional Authorities, which receive money annually from the state budget in a way that regularly creates problems with the continuous funding of services.<sup>18</sup> The system of enrolment in

<sup>13</sup> As stated during interviews with the Council's civil society members that took place in September 2019 by telephone and with the Office representatives that took place on 4<sup>th</sup> November in-person.

<sup>14</sup> Available at: <https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/zalezitosti-romske-komunity/5c--Statut-Rady-vlady-pro-zalezitosti-romske-mensiny.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> As stated by various interlocutors during interviews.

<sup>16</sup> Information on the forthcoming cuts was provided by the Office employees. More concrete numbers concerning the cuts are available for the whole of Office of Government - from an estimation of 639 employees by the end of 2019 there should be 504 in 2020. Information available at: <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/babisovi-ministri-navrhli-skrty-kvuli-nimz-prijdou-tisice-lidi-o-praci-82803?dop-ab-variant=100&seq-no=1&source=hp>

<sup>17</sup> The annual survey of the Public Opinion Research Centre investigates Czech public attitudes toward various ethnic groups living in the Czech Republic. Roma are regularly the ethnic group which Czechs find the least sympathetic. For more details see [https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com\\_form2content/documents/c2/a4905/f9/ov190415.pdf](https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c2/a4905/f9/ov190415.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> In 2019 the budget was particularly strained, as documented here: <https://plus.rozhlas.cz/na-socialnich-sluzby-chybi-2-miliardy-system-financovani-je-spatny-tvrdi-7903687>

the so-called Regional Basic Network of Social Services, which is a prerequisite for NGOs to receive funding through the Regional Authorities, is perceived by the service providers as an even bigger barrier.<sup>19</sup> As described in [previous RCM reports](#), the process of registering services in these networks is not transparent and depends on outdated strategic plans that do not necessarily reflect current situations; they also depend on support from particular municipalities (i.e., on the relationships of the NGOs with the municipalities). Taking into account the often-hostile attitudes of local governments towards Roma as described below, municipal support is not always based on the necessity for and quality of the provided services. The registration is valid for three years, after which each service is subjected to a new assessment. The lack of financing is addressed by the Regional Authorities by constraining the extent of the social services provided on their territory; this is a general long-term trend. In 2019, the Ústecký Regional Authority officially suspended extension of the Basic Network, which means service providers cannot seek financing for new services or increase the number of employees providing existing services.<sup>20</sup> For service providers who are able to secure financing from other sources, there is the option of registering their services in what is called the Development Network for the duration of that other financing.

The Ministry of Social Affairs is aware of the problems with the current system of social service provision and is preparing an amendment to the Law on Social Services that should lead to improvement of the situation.<sup>21</sup> It would be beneficial for the service-providing NGOs if the funding and methodological guidance for activities of a preventive nature (as opposed to stationary services like rest homes) would be administered directly by the ministry; the NGOs would then become less dependent on the Regional Authorities, which act based on various local interests and relationships,<sup>22</sup> and the related methodology, which has varied regionally, could become integrated nationally. The benefit of a centralised methodology is that similar issues could be resolved similarly in every region (currently some steps are possible to take in one region but not another, i.e., one's place of residence influences the scope of assistance offered by social service providers).

NGO activities other than social service provision are even harder to finance.

The Culture Ministry, the Education Ministry, and the Office of the Government administer subsidies (including for NGOs) explicitly targeting Roma.

The subsidies of the Education Ministry focus on support for Roma pupils and students from socially excluded environments to complete their primary and secondary education (NGO tutorial programmes and scholarship programs administered by schools are the primary recipients; for more details on scholarship programmes, see [the second RCM report on the Czech Republic](#)). One of the Education Ministry subsidies is focused on "educational activities of national minorities", through which two projects were financed in 2018 – one aiming to promote the use of the Romani language among children, and the other aiming to promote teaching Roma history in the schools. NGOs applying in the "Support for integration of the Romani community" call have complaints about the administrative process – the calls are published very late (e.g., the latest call for projects that should be realised in 2020 was published on the ministry webpage on 6 December

<sup>19</sup> Experience described by service providing NGOs, members of the RCM coalition.

<sup>20</sup> As stated e.g. in the regional government's document *Metodika zajištění sítě sociálních služeb Ústeckého kraje*, available at: [https://www.kr-ustecky.cz/assets/File.ashx?id\\_org=450018&id\\_dokumenty=1731711](https://www.kr-ustecky.cz/assets/File.ashx?id_org=450018&id_dokumenty=1731711)

<sup>21</sup> As stated in: *Východiska pro systémovou změnu financování a další úpravy sociálních služeb* (2019). Available at: <https://socialnipolitika.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/V%C3%BDchodiska-pro-syst%C3%A9movou-%C3%BApravu-financov%C3%A1n%C3%AD-a-dal%C5%A1%C3%AD-n%C3%A1vrhy-na-%C3%BApravu-soci%C3%A1ln%C3%ADch-slu%C5%BEb-verze-10.-%C4%8Dervna-2019.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> For more details on the impact of the current social services funding mechanism on NGOs' ability to exercise independent advocacy, see [the first RCM report on the Czech Republic](#).

2019 and the deadline for application was 10 January 2020), leaving limited time to complete the applications; the information is generally not accessible; and the results are officially communicated only after an enormous delay. For a call to finance projects with activities spreading throughout one year, the ministry is regularly announcing the results in July of that year, with some applicants not receiving official confirmation of the decision to fund them until late autumn of the relevant year. NGOs applying for funding under this call are mostly implementing activities aiming at supporting children from disadvantaging backgrounds in their educational activities, which require continuous implementation. Therefore, they mostly decide to implement the activities even without being sure if their application for funding will be successful, and if their application is not successful, they then have to absorb the financial burden of the project activities.

The subsidies administered by the Culture Ministry focus on support for cultural activities and the Romani language and, although organising and participating in cultural activities can be empowering, the programmes themselves and the projects supported by them are not focused on increasing Roma participation in public affairs.

The Office of the Government's subsidy programme designed for NGOs is called "Prevention of social exclusion and community work". Its aim is *"to activate civic participation, especially by Roma, through NGOs in activities supporting prevention of social exclusion [...] and to support community work in the so-called socially excluded localities."* The subsidy programme is clearly focused on Roma living in social exclusion and lacks other dimensions, such as human rights protection, anti-discrimination, emancipation and political participation.

The other subsidies administered by the Office are reserved for municipal programmes of field work and for financing the positions of Regional Coordinators for Roma Affairs. Support for implementation of the European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages has its own separate call.

The Office of the Government subsidies, described above, provide a relatively small amount of money (see the table below). Grants are provided for a one-year period; the subsidies should be distributed by 31 March (and again by 30 September if the payment is made in two phases)<sup>23</sup> but applicants are commonly not even officially informed about the decision to finance them until the end of March.<sup>24</sup> Projects supported by these subsidies also have to secure 30% co-financing which is, for reasons described in this chapter, not an easy task for NGOs.

<sup>23</sup> As stated in the *Governmental principles for distributing subsidies from the state budget by central public authorities to non-governmental organizations*, resolution of the government of the Czech Republic no. 92 from 1 February 2010.

<sup>24</sup> For more information on the programme see:  
<https://www.vlada.cz/scripts/detail.php?pgid=943&conn=9346&pg=1>

Chapters in the state budget	Year 2018	
	CZK	EUR <sup>25</sup>
<b>Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport</b>		
1. Support for integration of the Romani community	12,800,000	501,961
2. Support for socially disadvantaged Romani pupils of secondary schools, conservatories and higher technical schools	5,851,000	229,463
3. Support for educational activities of national minorities	415,000	16,279
<b>Ministry of Culture</b>		
4. Support for the cultural activities of the members of national minorities	1,230,000	48,235
5. Support for integration of the members of the Roma minority	1,973,000	77,353
6. Support of regional cultural traditions	100,000	3,922
7. Support for disseminating and receiving information in national minority languages	3,219,000	126,235
8. Support for developing important cultural activities of churches and religious societies	30,000	1,177
9. The area of the professional art of music	600,000	23,529
10. Museum of Romani Culture, Brno	25,501,000	1,000,039
11. Buyout of the pig farm in Lety <sup>26</sup>	450,815,000	17,679,012
<b>Office of the Government of the Czech Republic – Office of the Czech Government Council on Romani Minority Affairs</b>		
12. Office of Government Council on Romani Minority Affairs	160,000	6,262
13. Subsidy program – Support for Field Social Work	11,203,000	439,338
14. Subsidy program – Prevention of Social Exclusion and Community Work	11,993,000	470,304
15. Subsidy Program – Support for the Romani Affairs Coordinators	5,524,000	216,620
16. Support for implementation of the European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages	647,000	25,366
<b>Total</b>	<b>81,245,000</b>	<b>3,186,080</b>
<b>Total (the buyout of Lety pig farm included)</b>	<b>532,060,000</b>	<b>20,865,092</b>

Source: Overview of financial means from the 2018 state budget used for the support of Roma integration (as cited in the Report on the State of the Roma Minority in the Czech Republic in 2018).

<sup>25</sup> Approximate amounts, conversion rate 25.5 CZK /1 EUR.

<sup>26</sup> See the chapter *Addressing antigypsyism* in the first RCM report on the Czech Republic for more details on this issue.

As the financial amounts allocated to NGOs from the state budget illustrate, Roma inclusion is not a priority of the Czech government (for details see the table below). Most of the money from state subsidies that is distributed to NGOs is directed to the area of sport, without requiring any inclusive measures as a condition of funding:

Main priority	Estimation of financing for 2019		Estimations of financing for 2020	
	CZK	EUR <sup>27</sup>	CZK	EUR <sup>28</sup>
Fight against corruption	2,900,000	113,726	4,000,000	156,863
Housing	7,820,212	306,675	0	0
Children and youth	264,424,854	10,369,602	283,194,100	11,105,651
Culture	24,207,040	949,296	24,712,000	969,098
National minorities	15,039,000	589,765	15,039,000	589,765
Consumer protection	19,000,000	745,098	19,000,000	745,098
Other	21,661,792	849,482	41,000,000	1,607,843
Healthcare and prevention	42,000,000	1,647,059	28,500,000	1,117,647
Drug policy	0	0	0	0
Risky behaviour	14,350,000	562,745	12,000,000	470,588
Family policy	96,500,000	3,784,314	120,000,000	4,705,882
<b>Roma minority</b>	<b>25,875,000</b>	<b>1,014,706</b>	<b>25,625,000</b>	<b>1,004,902</b>
Equal opportunities of women and men	4,100,000	160,784	2,100,000	82,353
Social services	117,698,000	4,615,608	164,200,000	6,439,216
<b>Physical education and sport</b>	<b>4,596,757,023</b>	<b>180,264,981</b>	<b>4,734,000,000</b>	<b>185,647,059</b>
Education and HR	1,232,590	48,337	1,800,000	70,588
Foreign affairs activities	191,415,769	7,506,5001	181,400,000	7,113,726
Environment and sustainable development	23,000,000	901,961	23,000,000	901,961
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,467,981 280</b>	<b>214,430,638</b>	<b>5,679,570,100</b>	<b>222,728,239</b>

Source: "Main areas of state subsidies policy towards non-governmental organizations for 2020"<sup>29</sup>

The EEA and Norway Grants<sup>30</sup> are very much welcomed by the Czech NGO sector, as they are the only bigger financial mechanism enabling the financing of watchdog and advocacy activities. Nevertheless, there is a disparity between NGOs as recipients versus public

<sup>27</sup> Approximate amounts, conversion rate 25.5 CZK/1 EUR.

<sup>28</sup> Approximate amounts, conversion rate 25.5 CZK/1 EUR.

<sup>29</sup> Available at: <https://www.vlada.cz/cz/ppov/rnno/aktuality/hlavni-oblasti-statni-dotacni-politiky-vuci-nno-pro-rok-2020-176307/>. For an analysis of public subsidies for NGOs see *Rozbor financování nestátních neziskových organizací z veřejných rozpočtů v roce 2016* Available at: <https://www.vlada.cz/cz/ppov/rnno/dokumenty/rozbor-financovani-nestatnich-neziskovych-organizaci-168259/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://eeagrants.org/>

authorities as recipients of this financing – the public authorities receive 100% financing, while the NGOs have to demonstrate 10 % co-financing. Co-financing bigger projects can be a difficult task for NGOs, mainly due to the above-described lack of private financing in the area of Roma inclusion. The calls are also not oriented toward NGOs running small projects. The same is true for the ESIF,<sup>31</sup> where the calls are oriented towards bigger-scale projects.

Smaller organisations participate in projects run by Regional Authorities through which local organisations are contracted to provide social services. In general, small local organizations have restricted access to financing and lack support.

<sup>31</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes/overview-funding-programmes/european-structural-and-investment-funds\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes/overview-funding-programmes/european-structural-and-investment-funds_en)

## POLICY COORDINATION AND INTEGRATED APPROACHES

The NRIS should be the government document enabling an integrated approach to Roma inclusion, and the National Roma Contact Point (NRCP) should be the coordinating centre in that matter. The Office should be fulfilling the NRCP position but does not have the appropriate budget or capacity for this at the moment.

### Office of the Government Council for Roma Affairs

The Office is an administrative unit of the Department of Human Rights and National Minorities (Department) at the Office of the Government. The Department has fallen victim to a trend that has been observed over the last few years, that of weakening its operational capacity, as illustrated by the continuous reduction to the number of its employees. The reduction of employees is a general trend amongst the civil service under the current administration.<sup>32</sup>

Over the last two years, the staff of the Office has been cut in half. It currently features six full-time positions, one of which is unstaffed (so there are currently five employees). Moreover, the Office also serves as the Secretariat of the Government Council for National Minorities (which role requires one full-time position and one half-time position). One staff member's position is dedicated to administering the subsidies allocated through the Office (and another employee helps with this during the times of year when the workload is heaviest). This means there are currently fewer than three full-time employees responsible for the agenda related to the Council secretariat; for the functioning of its committees and working groups; for methodological guidance of the Regional Coordinators for Roma Affairs and Roma advisors at the municipal level; for preparation of the "Annual Report on the State of the Roma Minority in the Czech Republic"; or for monitoring and commenting on related legislation. It is, therefore, no surprise that the implementation of the NRIS is neither sufficiently coordinated with the authorities responsible for particular goals and measures, nor is the implementation itself progressing.

Besides the very small number of employees to cover the Office's agenda, there is also a high level of staff fluctuation, and therefore continuity of the Office's work is not secured. Just one of the Office's employees is of Roma origin. No systematic measures are being undertaken to motivate Roma candidates to work for the Office.

The low capacity of the Office directly affects the functioning of the Council and its committees (e.g., the number of meetings held by the working groups) as there are not enough employees to arrange all of the proceedings administratively, logistically and content-wise.<sup>33</sup> The Office should also prepare background materials for Council meetings and cannot rely on external commissions, its budget being very small.

Lack of appropriate communications activities is another outcome of the Office's capacity shortage; information about the Council, the Office, and the NRIS is not disseminated broadly enough (just some information is published on the Office's website, mostly only in Czech). This contributes to a misunderstanding amongst the (Roma) public about how the Council functions, which exacerbates its low-prestige status and the very weak general public knowledge about the existence and content of the NRIS and the problems associated with its implementation.

<sup>32</sup> Numbers for the whole of Office of Government are available. From an estimation of 639 employees by the end of 2019 there should be 504 in 2020. Information available at: <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/babisovi-ministri-navrhli-skrty-kvuli-nimz-prijdou-tisice-lidi-o-praci-82803?dop-ab-variant=100&seq-no=1&source=hp>

<sup>33</sup> Information based on interviews with members of the Council and a former employee of the Human Rights Department of the Office of the Government.

The Office's capacity to effectively coordinate the NRIS implementation is also affected by its political position. The area of human rights, under which Roma affairs are included, is covered by the position of the Government Human Rights Commissioner, who has been charged by the government with overseeing the human rights-related agenda. Under three of the governments during the last 20 years there has also been a cabinet position of Human Rights Minister. The current arrangement is in place since 2018, although a similar one has existed before; it depends very much on the current government to give political cover to the area of human rights and minorities issues, and thus this changes quite frequently. Political cover is currently being provided by a Human Rights Commissioner with administration provided by civil servants in the Department; this arrangement is not an institutionally powerful enough position for negotiations with the ministries concerning the NRIS implementation.

## Coordination

The capacity of the Office and its position directly affects the status of the NRIS among other strategic government documents and the possibilities of its effective implementation.

The current NRIS, if it is mentioned at all by other strategic documents, is referred to just formally and is not a strategic document that is regularly used by the state authorities.<sup>34</sup> It is very weakly coordinated or interconnected with the rest of government strategy. When a new strategic document relative to Roma inclusion is created by another state authority, the Office is usually approached to comment on a finished document rather than being actively engaged throughout the drafting process.

The disadvantage of an inter-ministerial document such as the NRIS lies in the fact that without regular, systematic reminders of their obligations, the ministries somehow forget about their duties in this regard. This can be illustrated by the number of measures reported annually in the framework of the NRIS monitoring that are not directly connected to Roma inclusion (for details, see the previous RCM reports).<sup>35</sup> Regular communication between the Office and the ministries occurs at Council meetings (where ministers are members) and additionally once a year when information about the NRIS implementation indicators is gathered from the ministries. The newly-established Committee on NRIS Implementation, as described above, should help address this deficit.

The upcoming NRIS is currently being prepared by the Office without any broader, systematic consultations or coordination with any other nascent strategic documents. It is being created at the administrative level, apparently based on the existing NRIS. The Office is open to providing drafts of the NRIS chapters to experts for comment (such as the Council's working groups, or to the civil society members of the Council or others interested enough to contact the Office) and they are cooperating with other public bodies, such as the ASI and the Office of the Public Defender of Rights (the ombudswoman). The Office is also planning to conduct wider consultations through its website when the draft strategy is ready.

## A note on mainstream and Roma-targeted approaches

With all the barriers currently in place that preclude the effective implementation of the NRIS, and given the fact that Roma social exclusion is still the biggest Roma-related issue

<sup>34</sup> Information provided by current and former civil servants during in-person interviews throughout September to November 2019; for comparison see stronger strategic documents such as the Social Inclusion Strategy (Labour ministry), Education 2020 (Education Ministry) or the Strategy for Regional Development (Regional Development Ministry).

<sup>35</sup> For the output from the NRIS indicators monitoring for year 2018 see: <https://www.vlada.cz/cz/ppov/zalezitosti-romske-komunity/dokumenty/zprava-o-stavu-romske-mensiny-v-ceske-republice-za-rok-2018-177049/>

present in public policies (being covered by the ASI, for example), questions about the most effective ways of reaching Roma tend to resurge.

The possibility to effectively implement Roma inclusion policies (and to evaluate their efficiency) has been hindered by the non-existence of reliable data disaggregated by ethnicity (as discussed in the first and second RCM reports). The lack of data is also often used as an excuse by public authorities for inaction. In the framework of the ESIF, only the managing authority of OP Education is gathering qualified estimates of Roma participants through indicators tracked by particular implementers but has not published any outcomes from that data gathering yet. The Education Ministry's annual estimate of Roma pupils is being challenged by both principals and teachers as problematic, mainly due to the third-party identification method it entails.<sup>36</sup> The ASI is also trying to take into account the ethnic composition of the localities where it is present through an initial situational analysis and by investigating the specific impact of the activities undertaken by the implementers of ASI-related projects on Roma (currently a pilot analysis is underway in Brno and Ostrava). The most significant initiative in the area of ethnic data gathering in the upcoming period will be a project implemented by the Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs in which a methodology for ethnic data collection should be established and such data gathering should commence. The project will be financed by EEA/Norway Grants and is currently in its initial phase.

The lack of certainty about the direction of Roma inclusion policies is reflected in the state's continuously alternating between mainstream or Roma-targeted approaches, whereby authorities embrace first one and then the other approach. While we are aware of the recommendation of an "explicit but not exclusive" targeting approach of mainstream policies, we will nevertheless proceed here by putting forward the arguments for leaning more towards one or the other approach.

The arguments for taking a mainstream approach are based on the reluctance of local governments to include Roma; according to proponents of this approach, focusing the discourse on social inclusion as such will enable inclusion in environments otherwise hostile to Roma. Where a Roma-targeted policy would be rebuffed without the slightest consideration, a more all-encompassing social inclusion policy would have a chance of implementation reaching Roma as well.

The argument against Roma-targeted financing is the perceived danger in quantifying Roma inclusion financing – quantifying the sums designated specifically for Roma inclusion could trigger further negative reactions towards Roma and towards NGOs working for Roma inclusion and public policies implemented in this direction. Concerns also remain that the discourse centred on social exclusion is creating and upholding the perception of the Roma minority as being wholly equivalent to the problems of poverty and social exclusion. This means Roma identity *per se* is considered a social disadvantage.

Arguments for more explicit targeting of financing and policies toward Roma are based in the fact that social exclusion disproportionately affects Roma, that the target group of all people living in/threatened by social exclusion is too broad, and that mainstream policies do not ensure Roma will be reached. Concerns persist that Roma are not accordingly benefiting from the mainstream programmes. Given the reluctance of local governments to work towards Roma inclusion (as explored below) it is questionable whether Roma people benefit equally from the projects associated with the Coordinated Approach to Socially Excluded Localities (CASEL; for more information on CASEL see the first chapter and the case studies in [the first RCM report on the Czech Republic](#)). Some NGO representatives taking part in the RCM coalition would therefore see it as advantageous if

<sup>36</sup> For more information on the position of certain pedagogues and school directors see: <https://www.pedagogicka-komora.cz/2019/09/skoly-by-nemely-pristoupit-na-scitani.html#more>

Roma-specific calls were included in the upcoming programming period in order to ensure Roma benefit from the programmes accordingly.

However, if Roma are to benefit from any policies, whether mainstream or targeted, there has to be a pronounced emphasis on ensuring equal opportunities, anti-discrimination, and desegregation, which is not currently happening in the Czech Republic (for details, see the previous RCM reports). The focus on anti-discrimination and desegregation seems, in the Czech context, a way to target the specific barriers Roma are facing while minimizing the risks of triggering further racism, which targeted policy (and even “explicit but not exclusive” policy) has the potential to trigger, given the widespread logic that it would be unfair if Roma were to receive something the non-Roma do not.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF GOVERNMENTAL POLICIES ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

The NRIS is binding only on the central government bodies. As was already explored in previous RCM reports on the Czech Republic, regional and municipal governments enjoy very significant autonomy in the Czech Republic and take action when they feel their autonomy is threatened. Municipalities are eager to guard their competences and to exercise control over their territories but are less prepared to take responsibility for all their residents. This can be illustrated by the fact that the adoption of a social housing law has been boycotted by the municipalities (for more details see [the second RCM report](#)) without any accompanying massive surge of municipal initiatives to tackle local housing shortages on their own. Many municipalities still believe they can simply coerce their “undesirable” residents (i.e., Roma living in social exclusion) into moving away; we briefly present two examples of such measures below. The most widely used measure locally is the possibility to halt new payments of state housing benefits in specific locations (*idem*). Some municipalities even go so far as to close or demolish accommodation facilities inhabited by socially excluded Roma.

### Current examples of municipalities acting against the purpose of the NRIS

**Karviná** is a municipality that publicly acts against inclusion and therefore against the intent of the NRIS; the local authority amasses popularity amongst non-Roma residents based on its asocial acts. Recent policy consists of local government representatives and municipal police visiting Roma tenants in their homes to audit their rental contracts, whether they are renting from the municipality or from a private owner. Karviná’s mayor has been demonstratively present during these visits.<sup>37</sup>

**Slaný**, which is implementing the CASEL and has signed a memorandum with the ASI stating that it endorses inclusive measures, has declared certain areas to be zones for which tenants cannot newly qualify for housing benefits, including the addresses of municipally-owned social housing units and the municipally-owned residential hotel.<sup>38</sup>

It must be mentioned, on the other hand, that in a number of municipalities attitudes are changing and implementation of social inclusion policies has been continually growing over the past decade. Political will, however, is a very important factor in local decision-making, and this also means mechanisms put forward by one local administration can be stopped by a newly elected one, as the example of the City of Brno and its social housing programme shows.<sup>39</sup>

The lack of political will to deal with issues of Roma inclusion is widespread (as described in previous RCM reports on the Czech Republic) and the political lack of interest in issues of Roma inclusion at the level of the central government is influencing regional and local governments, which do not feel any pressure to deal with these issues themselves. Roma inclusion is not a topic that would be perceived by representatives of local governments as

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.karvina.cz/deje-se/bezpecna-karvina-kontroly-probihaji-opakovane> and [https://karvinsky.denik.cz/zpravy\\_region/chces-u-nas-bydlet-nejprve-si-te-proklepneme-20180630.html](https://karvinsky.denik.cz/zpravy_region/chces-u-nas-bydlet-nejprve-si-te-proklepneme-20180630.html). The fact of being able to execute such audits **even in privately-owned apartments** is made possible by a contract with the biggest local housing provider, *Residomo*, which is on good terms with the municipality. Moreover, Residomo is currently demolishing apartment blocks inhabited mostly by socially excluded Roma. For more information see: [https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/karvina-bourani-domu-residomo\\_1904100620\\_tec](https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/karvina-bourani-domu-residomo_1904100620_tec)

<sup>38</sup> Information communicated by a member of the RCM coalition familiar with the situation in an in-person interview in October 2019. For details see also the official municipal act: <https://www.meuslany.cz/opatreni-obecne-povahy-stanoveni-oblasti-se-zvysenym-vyskytem-socialne-nezadoucich-jevu-na-uzemi-mesta-slany/d-62887/p1=34959>

<sup>39</sup> See e.g. <https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/regiony/2913884-brno-poskytne-dvacet-socialnich-bytu-podle-protestujicich-na-zastupitelstvu-je-malo>

one that would bring them popularity and, as described in [the first RCM report](#), Roma voter turnout is low.<sup>40</sup> It is necessary to focus on increasing election turnout among Roma, as earning the Roma vote could become an incentive for inclusive local government action. The effects of increased Roma voter turnout can be illustrated by the situation in the town of Náchod. Before the 2018 local elections there, a local Roma activist engaged in a get-out-the vote drive among Roma voters. She claims that local elected officials noticed the increased Roma turnout and, as a consequence, the municipality has begun paying attention to issues faced by local Roma. Activists and NGOs are not the only ones who could play a role in increasing Roma voter turnout; both central and local public authorities could do more by at least informing potential Roma voters thoroughly about the election process and focusing on areas with low voter turnout.

The NRIS acknowledges that its goals cannot be implemented without cooperating with local-level public authorities, stating: "*The NRIS is putting regional and local governments into the positions of implementers of its measures; without their participation, the NRIS would have mainly remained an archival document.*"<sup>41</sup>

### Sub-national structures in Roma inclusion

The only systematic measures used to engage local and regional authorities are the positions of Regional Coordinators for Roma Affairs and Roma advisors with the municipalities, positions considered the "basic implementation structure of Roma integration in the Czech Republic"<sup>42</sup> (for further information on the positions, see also the previous RCM reports). The positions of Regional Coordinators for Roma Affairs are financed from state subsidies administered by the Office, which also ensures their methodological guidance. The subsidies (500,000 CZK or approximately 19,600 EUR per year per coordinator) are meant to cover all the costs related to the execution of this position, not just the Coordinators' salaries, and therefore co-financing from the regional budgets is necessary. Only a minority of Coordinators (three out of 14 regions) are assigned full-time to Roma affairs issues (the other assignments usually deal with coordinating national minority and foreigner-related affairs), the average of their positions being slightly more than half-time in 2018.<sup>43</sup> The state of the execution of the position of Roma advisors at municipal level and their numbers have not changed significantly since production of the first RCM report and the working hours of the employees assigned to this agenda remain negligible (less than quarter-time positions).

The Interior Ministry has ways to audit how local governments execute their delegated powers and could contribute to monitoring and addressing the discriminatory and segregating measures they take. In 2018, the Interior Ministry's Department of Public Administration, Supervision and Control effectuated an assessment of local governments' rules on municipal housing provision and offered methodological guidance to the municipalities where discriminatory rules were found.<sup>44</sup> The assessment was done as part of the ministry's task set in the Strategy against Social Exclusion. The department could also more systematically monitor the establishment of school catchment areas, which often contribute to segregation in education (as described in previous RCM reports), and as the above-mentioned assessment of the rules on municipal housing shows, it would be best if the task would be assigned to the Interior Ministry by a third party.

<sup>40</sup> For more details on Roma voter turnout and on Roma candidates in the Czech elections see RCM Y1.

<sup>41</sup> NRIS, goal 11.

<sup>42</sup> Czech Republic. 2019. *Information on the Implementation of the Roma Integration Strategy for 2020 in 2018*. Praha: Office of the Government of the Czech Republic.

<sup>43</sup> *Report on the State of Roma Minority in the Czech Republic in 2018*.

<sup>44</sup> For more details see the *Information on the Activities of the Department of Public Administration, Supervision and Control at the Interior Ministry of the Czech Republic in 2018*; available at: <https://www.mvcr.cz/clanek/sborniky-odboru-verejne-spravy-doзору-a-kontroly.aspx>

## Agency for Social Inclusion in municipalities

The ASI has been the most important vehicle of social inclusion on the local level since its establishment. However, because its own operation is project-based, not systematically financed from the state budget, it cannot cover the entire state territory<sup>45</sup> and its focus depends on implemented projects. The ASI is motivating municipalities to implement social inclusion measures through its own activities, mainly by providing incentives associated with opportunities to apply for ESIF financing. ASI local counsellors are in contact with the Regional Coordinators for Roma Affairs and the Roma advisors at municipal level, so basic coordination with NRIS implementation is ensured that way. Besides cooperation with particular municipalities, the ASI is also collaborating with Regional Authorities, which formulate regional social inclusion strategies. Three Regional Authorities (of 14) are currently engaged in a project with the ASI. A handful of regions have also formulated regional Roma integration strategies.

Local initiatives such as the CASEL and Local Action Groups (as the structures implementing Community-Led Local Development, CLLD)<sup>46</sup> are relatively high-threshold activities focusing on municipalities and stakeholders who are already important in the area. Even these measures do not have mechanisms to include less powerful organizations and/or to activate Roma, to say nothing of those living in social exclusion. It is not the ASI, for example, who decides on membership in the CASEL, but the local partnership itself. The ASI and its local counsellors are more facilitators and supporters of the processes, and if they want to lead the municipalities towards implementing inclusive measures, they have to act sensitively, as there still is great resistance to inclusion in many areas. In this context, the ASI perceives a communicational advantage to be its focus on social inclusion *per se* because, as described above, municipalities are less willing to take steps toward policies directed specifically at Roma inclusion.

Starting in January 2020 the ASI will become an administrative part of the Ministry for Regional Development; it is too early to say what impact that change will have on its work.

The ASI is criticised by civil society representatives for taking an administrative approach, thereby omitting the human rights dimension of social exclusion issues. For example, the ASI has continued to cooperate with municipalities stopping the new payment of housing benefits on certain parts of their territories (an issue described in [the second RCM report](#)). The ASI claims to be discouraging municipalities from declaring such zones, but does not perceive it to be constructive to stop cooperation with municipalities that do implement this measure, as it is a lawful option currently available to them.

The question is who in the Czech Republic could perform the role of more systematically reminding local policymakers of the human rights dimension of the problems Roma face. Apart from their critique of the ASI described above, most local NGOs are service providers and need to be on good terms with municipalities to be able to obtain financing. Roma advisors at local municipal level are municipal employees whose Roma-related agenda comprises, as described above, a very small percentage of their work, and the same applies to the Regional Coordinators. As already mentioned above, increasing Roma voter turnout and consequently more active political participation by Roma would be a very important step toward enhancing local-level Roma inclusion, in all its dimensions.

<sup>45</sup> According to the ASI Annual Report for 2018, 35% of socially excluded localities in the Czech Republic were covered by the Agency's work in 2018, and according to information on its webpage 55% were covered as of the end of 2019. <https://www.socialni-zaclenovani.cz/dokument/2018-vyrocní-zpráva-agentury-pro-socialni-zaclenovani/>; <https://www.socialni-zaclenovani.cz/>

<sup>46</sup> Roma NGOs that succeed in cooperating with the Local Action Groups (LAGs) praise their mechanisms. However, massive utilisation of the LAGs as vehicles of Roma inclusion is not realistic, as most municipalities and other actors in rural development do not perceive it to be the most important issue and their financing is not designed for bigger-scale projects. Information about the Local Action Groups is available at: <http://nsmascr.cz/>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Participation

1. The State administration should create a systematic programme in order to increase the number of Roma civil servants (e.g., through internships, creating diversity manager positions, positive measures, etc.).
2. Political parties should help improve Roma representativeness at local level by proposing and supporting Roma candidacies in local elections;
3. The Office of the Government Council for Roma Affairs should support – through its own programme or through the subsidies administered by the Office – civic education and awareness raising activities aimed at increasing voter turnout amongst Roma.
4. The state should invest in strengthening the capacities of Roma youth, particularly young Roma women, to take public office in local administrations.

### The Government Council for Roma Affairs and the Office of the Council

5. The selection criteria for the civil society members of the Council should be based on expertise in order for the civil society members to be able to come up with high-quality recommendations and to enable them to be equal partners to their ministerial counterparts.
6. The Council should narrow its focus and justify its prioritization, not just amongst its members, but to the public as well.
7. The civil society members of the Council should be remunerated for their work, in the same way their counterparts from the government and the Office are for their working time.
8. The Prime Minister – as the Council's chair and head of government – should ensure and follow up on the transfer of the Council's motions and positions into concrete policies and warrant that the tasks imposed on the state authorities by the Council are properly implemented.
9. The Office of the Council's budget should be increased so the Office can commission analyses or other necessary materials from external parties and thus increase the quality of the Council's background materials.
10. The number of Office employees should be increased in order to boost its operational and professional capacity and to be able to handle its entire agenda.
11. Council experts should have designated partners in the Office who would be able to prepare the materials necessary for Council meetings with them.
12. The Office should inform the public of the Council's activities, its own activities, and the related agenda in a more effective, regular way in order to increase public awareness about the Council and the NRIS.

### Government subsidies

13. Decisions about government subsidies for NGOs and the financing itself should be delivered on time per the "Governmental principles for distributing subsidies from the state budget" by central public authorities to non-governmental organizations.
14. The budget of the government subsidies targeting Roma integration should be increased in order to improve the impact of the supported projects.

15. The government subsidies mechanism for NGOs should be based on multi-annual financing which would guarantee more stability to NGOs and the opportunity for them to plan multi-annually.

### Coordination

16. The ministries relevant to NRIS implementation should assign employees responsible specifically for NRIS implementation and report regularly on their progress.
17. The Office should be actively engaged in creating other state authorities' strategic documents (e.g., the Action Plans of the Social Inclusion Strategy, which will be prepared in the near future) and every such document should be submitted to the Office to check its possible impact on Roma.
18. The Office (as the coordinating body for the NRIS) and the Department for Social Inclusion at the Labour and Social Affairs Ministry (as the coordinating body for the Strategy for Social Inclusion) should work together intensively to unify the intertwined goals and measures of both strategies. The possibility of merging the NRIS with the Social Inclusion Strategy should be explored.

### Ensuring that Roma benefit from mainstream policies

19. The government should clearly stand up for the principles of inclusion and desegregation and should conduct its public discourse in that manner.
20. The Statistical Office should include ethnicity in their regular surveys (e.g., the SILC and the LFS).
21. Calls for project proposals (both government subsidies and the ESIF) should use performance indicators as incentives for Roma inclusion.

### Roma inclusion at the local level

22. The positions of Regional Coordinators for Roma Affairs and Roma Advisors should be boosted by increasing the available financing for both kinds of positions in such a way that systematic work with regional and local authorities on incorporating the NRIS goals and measures into regional and local documents becomes possible. The Coordinators and Advisors should be able to monitor and support the implementation of Roma inclusion measures at regional and local level.
23. The state should invest more of its own resources into the Agency for Social Inclusion in order to ensure its more systematic impact.
24. The central state authorities – executive, judicial and legislative – should strengthen their obligations to regularly monitor and publish the outcomes of their activities in the area of combating discriminatory, segregating acts and measures committed or considered by local governments and Regional Authorities, making more systematic use of the control mechanisms available to the Interior Ministry relative to the execution of delegated powers by local governments and Regional Authorities.

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