

PRESS RELEASE

Children found out at the Defender's conference how the Defender could help them. In the meantime, politicians and experts discussed the role of a defender of the rights of children

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At the first conference at the Office of the Public Defender of Rights dedicated directly to children, the young participants addressed topics such as participation of children in public life, where they sought help in solving various problems and what they thought a defender of the rights of children should do. At a working meeting with politicians and experts held on the same day, the Public Defender of Rights and his deputy discussed not only the Defender's role in the protection of children's rights, but also the position of a defender of the rights of children.

Thanks to their win in a creative competition titled "How the Defender Helps Children", several school teams got the chance to participate in the conference for children¹. Four hundred students from 33 primary schools and multi-annual academic secondary schools from all over the Czech Republic participated in the competition. The eighty competition entries included songs, short stories, posters, pictures, poems, presentations, videos and comics.

"The children's interest was incredible. It confirmed to us that even the youngest ones were interested in what was happening around them and that they were not indifferent. As adults, we should support active participation of children in public life. Their view of the world and society can be unexpected and enriching," said Monika Šimůnková, Deputy Public Defender of Rights, who focuses on the issues of children. The first step towards children's participation, she says, is to discuss what they consider important or what they are concerned about: *"We need to find out how children imagine their participation in decision-making on matters that concern them, or where they seek help and whom they trust in problematic situations,"* said the Deputy Public Defender of Rights.

"We chose a way of communication that is friendly and attractive for children. The instructors prepared a lesson for them using methods from drama education. The children, divided in small groups, will experience in the form of a game what they imagine as active involvement in the life around them or what obstacles they encounter. We will continue working with these findings," added Petra Šuplerová, head of the Department of Family, Healthcare and Labour at the Defender's Office.

The conference for children is another activity performed within the project funded by the Norway Grants. In this project, the Defender's Office has already issued a leaflet [on the rights of children in children's homes and educational institutions](#) and a leaflet [for children hospitalised in psychiatric wards](#). The material dealing with [the Defender's competence](#) can be read online; in autumn 2020, it was also available to passengers in Prague and Brno public transport. In addition to the Czech version, the material has also been published in [English](#), [German](#), [Romani](#) and [Russian](#).

This year, the Defender's website dedicated to children deti.ochrance.cz received a new look. A total of seven videos made by the vlogger Anička will be posted there and on [YouTube](#), introducing the

¹ The conference for children and the press release were carried out as part of the project "Reinforcing the activities of the Public Defender of Rights in the protection of human rights (with the aim of establishing a National Human Rights Institution in the Czech Republic)", No. LP-PDP3-001. The project is part of Human Rights Programme financed from the 2014–2021 Norway grants through the Czech Ministry of Finance.

Defender and his work to children.

We are also completing the conversion of the texts of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Rights of the Child into an easy-to-read format so that they are easily understood by children or people with psychosocial disabilities.

Several dozen children contact the Defender every year². Last year, for example, fourteen-year-old Lucie was among these children. She did not like the fact that the children's home where she lived would not allow her to apply to the secondary school she had chosen. In the end, together with the relevant BSLPC and the children's home, we managed to arrange everything to Lucie's satisfaction.

Children's rights are included in various parts of the Defender's work, from the family, health and education areas to the prevention of child abuse in, for example, children's homes or educational institutions and the monitoring of the rights of people with disabilities. The Czech Republic has yet to establish the office of the defender of the rights of children.

"We are one of the last countries in Europe that lack not only a national human rights institution dedicated to monitoring and promoting human rights, but also institutions dealing with the protection of children's rights guaranteed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The activities of the Public Defender of Rights can only replace it to a certain extent. There is no independent institution that would consistently address children's rights and promote them at a systemic level. This was evident, for example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when children in the Czech Republic spent long months learning from home," said Stanislav Křeček, the Defender, at today's meeting with the deputies.

He also mentioned that he would prefer if the defender of the rights of children operated within the Office of the Public Defender of Rights. Then the new institution could build on the years of experience of local lawyers and officials. On the other hand, Křeček believes that when establishing a defender of the rights of children as an independent authority, it is necessary to prevent overlapping of competences. He also pointed out that the establishment of a new institution would require high expenditures from the state budget. However, according to the Public Defender of Rights, the specific setting of the competence and powers of the defender of the rights of children must be the result of a political decision.

² For more information see [Annual Report for 2021](#), pages 38-39.