

PRESS RELEASE

Current status 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)”

as at 31 August 2022

The four-year project, which started on 1 January 2020, is now halfway through. It was introduced to the public at an opening press conference in January 2020 and its goal is to increase the protection of the rights of persons falling under the Defender’s mandate, especially vulnerable groups such as children, youth and victims of ill-treatment and discrimination, thanks to the reinforcement of the staff of the legal department and the secretariat of the Public Defender of Rights. The project itself comprises a large number of activities, which can be divided into six thematic areas for easier understanding the project’s essence. The project will continue until 31 December 2023.

1. Analysis of the outputs of the Defender from the human rights and constitutional law perspective

We organised two internal training sessions for the Office’s lawyers concerning human rights and constitutional perspectives in the work of the Office of the Public Defender of Rights. The first training titled Constitutional and Human Rights Perspectives in the Work of the Office of the Public Defender of Rights: Strengthening the Office’s Human Rights Arguments was conducted in July 2020; the second training under the title Human Rights in the Office of the Public Defender of Rights: Strengthening Arguments and Co-operation took place in December 2021.

In co-operation with the Office’s experts in the areas of constitutional law and human rights, we created almost thirty documents, such as the Defender’s comments in the course of the legislative process with a human rights dimension, chapters of quarterly reports on the Defender’s activities for the Chamber of Deputies, sanction materials addressed to the Government (concerning a failure to remedy an identified shortcoming of an authority), and the Defender’s pleadings to the Constitutional Court.

2. Forging a partnership with the Norwegian National Human Rights Institution

In view of the lack of practical experience in carrying out the broad mandate of a national human rights institution (NHRI), the Office has established a partnership with the Norwegian NHRI in order to acquire the necessary know-how. We held two meetings within the established partnership. Due to the pandemic, the first visit was organised in October 2021 as a three-day on-line meeting. In June 2022, we visited our Norwegian partner in person for three days. This intensive face-to-face meeting

followed up on the general knowledge gained during the previous practical on-line workshop. In particular, we identified topics related to the establishment of a national human rights institution in the Czech Republic, as well as to the practical implementation of its functions in the activities of the Office according to the Paris Principles (setting forth prerequisites and regulating the functioning of the bodies for the promotion and protection of human rights).

Within the defined topics, we also focused on gaining a deeper understanding and practical experience of the daily operations of the Norwegian partner.

3. Follow-up visits to facilities where people deprived of liberty are or may be present

An important part of the process of monitoring the treatment of persons deprived of liberty consists of follow-up visits to facilities to verify that the recommendations previously addressed by the Defender to the facility have been implemented. Within the project, we visited 10 facilities where persons deprived of liberty are or may be present. Of all the visits performed, we draw up reports on how the facilities comply with the Defender's recommendations based on the initial visits. The finalisation of the report from the follow-up visit to the facility and the subsequent resolution of comments with the visited facility is a long-term process lasting several months. Towards the end, we will publish the report in the Defender's Opinions Register (ESO). To date, we have published [one final report](#) within the project.

As part of prevention of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment and other forms of ill-treatment, we organised awareness-raising activities through 9 seminars and trained 152 participants. The topics included, for example, findings from systematic visits to facilities for children requiring immediate assistance, as well as findings from visits to school facilities for institutional and protective education, problems related to the current concept of institutional and protective education, the system of care for children with drug addictions, participation of a child in decision-making related to his/her placement in a psychiatric ward, treatment of transgender children during their hospitalisation, and the Defender's findings concerning remand in custody.

We also strengthened the prevention of torture, cruel, inhuman, degrading treatment or punishment and other ill-treatment by drawing up a detailed manual for the Office's internal needs regarding follow-up visits to the facilities, and also developed a comprehensive system for evaluating the Defender's recommendations. This material allows us to clearly evaluate whether and to what extent measures have been taken in all the facilities visited and to conduct effective follow-up investigations.

4. Analysis of the state of affairs with respect to vulnerable children, their families and support for children's rights

Based on the findings obtained from inquiries and surveys, we issued **5 Defender's recommendations** within the project: [regarding the contact of children in foster care](#) not only with their parents; regarding the issue of [deinstitutionalisation of child care](#); [regarding the child's participation in decision-making](#) on matters related to his/her hospitalisation in a psychiatric ward; regarding the [increase in temporary fostering allowance](#); and regarding the [search for general foster parents](#) and adoptive parents for children placed in temporary foster care (first part). We are currently completing the second (subsequent) recommendation concerning the search for general foster parents and adoptive parents for children placed in temporary foster care. We are working on

a research (questionnaire) part of an inquiry initiated on our own motion in the matter of contact between children and their imprisoned parents.

Since the beginning of the project, we have organised 15 educational meetings for social workers and trained around 400 participants. We thus created a platform for sharing of examples of good practice, discussion about problems encountered by experts in the field and for presenting the Defender's recommendations.

We also tried to ensure that children are better informed about their rights and obligations and about everything the Defender does and can do for children. We innovated our website for children <https://deti.ochrance.cz>, which is finally responsive and also accessible to children with disabilities. The website got a new graphic design and is constantly being supplemented, modified and improved. Among other things, the website also contains several easy-to-read materials in graphic form suitable for children.

Further awareness-raising material for children, which we created within the project, consists in educational videos of the "Anička vloguje" (Anička's vlog) series available on the [Defender's YouTube channel](#).

We organised a competition for children where the winners could participate in the first ever conference dedicated to children. We invited children to work with their friends (e.g. from their class, school, school parliament or interest group) and to depict in any creative way "how the Defender helps children". The result could be a video, a collage of photographs or pictures, a poster, a short story, a song or anything else. Almost 400 children from 33 primary schools and multi-year academic secondary schools from all over the Czech Republic participated in the competition. All the creations sent to us by the children are displayed in the lobby and the entrance to the conference halls of our office in Brno. The exhibition is freely accessible to the public. We also created a [digital version of the exhibition](#). The first conference for children was held at the end of the school year. During the day, in addition to the discussion with the Defender and his deputy, the children created, tested and invented where they could be active, who they could turn to in case of problems and how the Defender could help them. Did you miss it? You can watch and listen to the recording of the conference on the [Defender's YouTube channel](#) or in our [photo report](#) or in the [CT:D report](#).

5. Improved effectiveness of promoting the right to equal treatment

Based on the findings obtained in monitoring activities, where the Defender systematically monitors the implementation of the right to equal treatment in the areas of Roma education, equal pay for women and men and procedural issues, the Defender issued two monitoring reports for the years [2020](#) and [2021](#).

In connection with the exercise of the right to equal treatment, we conducted a [research called EU Citizens in the Czech Republic](#) and, at the same time, we are working on four other surveys in the area of equal access to employment and housing, as well as in the area of availability of public buildings; and we also map the process of deinstitutionalisation of residential social services in the Czech Republic.

In connection with the completed EU Citizens in the Czech Republic research, we identified a number of findings that had to be addressed. The Defender thus issued [recommendations](#) for authorities and

territorial self-governing units based on the research findings.

Further recommendations of the Defender were issued within the provision of methodological assistance to people who were victims of discrimination [in the labour market on the grounds of parenthood](#).

Following the results of the EU Citizens in the Czech Republic research, we organised a workshop with the target group, representatives of ministries and other authorities, some administrative regions and non-profit organisations working with foreigners (EU citizens), where we presented and discussed the results of the research and the Defender's recommendations with a view to implementing them in practice.

6. Monitoring of rights of people with disabilities

During the implementation of the project, the Defender was entrusted with new competences with a human rights dimension, specifically with the monitoring of the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Within these competences, the Defender should systematically monitor how the Czech Republic fulfils its obligations under the Convention and notify central governmental authorities and the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of potential systemic problems.

Thanks to the project, we can focus on selected areas of the rights of people with disabilities. In the context of the right to live independently, we map the process of deinstitutionalisation in residential social services facilities of an institutional type; we also evaluate deinstitutionalisation plans in individual regions and, last but not least, we map the barriers and accessibility of public services in regional capitals. With a view to strengthening the information accessibility of the Office, we analyse the Office's outputs in order to create an internal accessibility methodology.

In view of the need to share experience and practice with monitoring bodies in other countries in the field of monitoring the rights of people with disabilities, we approached foreign monitoring bodies with a request for co-operation and the possibility of internships for several lawyers of the Office.