

Reinforcing human rights protection in the Czech Republic: The Defender draws on Norway's experience

27 February 2024

The Defender, Stanislav Křeček, and his deputy, Vít Alexander Schorm, introduced today the preparations made by their office with regard to the possible further expansion of their competence in the field of human rights protection. Over the past four years, the Defender has utilised 38.25 million Czech crowns under the Norway Grants project¹ to enhance his activities in the area of human rights with a number of surveys, reports and recommendations, as well as other activities aimed at experts and the general public. Thanks, among others, to the partnership with the [Norwegian National Human Rights Institution](#), the staff of the Defender's Office have gained experience in working methods typical of institutions with a broad human rights protection mandate. They already put the experience to use in their current work, and will benefit from it especially if the Public Defender of Rights assumes the role of a national human rights institution (NHRI) and a children's ombudsman. Both are envisaged by the forthcoming [amendment to the Public Defender of Rights Act](#), discussed by the [Legislative Council of the Government](#) on Thursday, 29 February.

From January 2020 to the end of 2023, eleven employees of the Defender's Office on average worked on the Norway Grants project, eight of them full-time. They specialised in areas such as protecting vulnerable children and their families, equal treatment and protection against discrimination, and prevention of ill-treatment of people restricted in their freedom. The project also comprised testing of the clarity of official texts and preparing professional materials such as comments on draft legal regulations, notifications addressed to the Government and statements provided to international organisations.

Practical outputs for the general public include a manual [for parents](#) and [employers](#) on equal treatment in the labour market and [recommendation](#) on how to avoid workplace discrimination. People can also complete an [e-learning course](#) on the basics of anti-discrimination law. Children, parents and teachers may find useful the [Convention on the Rights of the Child in a child-friendly version](#) and a [series of videos](#) on the Defender's mandate.

As part of the promotion of children's rights, a [conference for children](#) was held at the Defender's Office, followed by participation groups of secondary and primary school students focused on [possible changes in their schools](#), [preparation of projects](#) to improve

¹Project "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. This project is financed from the EEA and Norway Grants 2014–2021 and the State budget of the Czech Republic.

their surroundings, and discussions on the [right to privacy](#) and [mutual weighing of various rights](#).

At the expert workshops, the Defender shared, among other things, findings from surveys on good practice in [providing housing for vulnerable groups](#), [accessibility](#) of buildings and services for people with disabilities, and the [situation of workers from other EU countries](#). Eight recommendations concerning the protection of vulnerable children and their families include, for example, recommendations on how [the prison service](#) and [child social and legal protection authorities](#) could improve meetings and other contacts of children with their imprisoned parents. Other recommendations concern [the search for temporary foster parents](#) and [increasing the temporary foster parents' allowance](#).

The Defender also monitored how facilities where people are restricted in their freedom implemented his recommendations. This monitoring was conducted in a total of 20 facilities, from prisons, police cells, psychiatric hospitals and facilities for foreigners to children's homes.

"The gradual expansion of the Defender's competence to include human rights issues has already brought a development. Aside from helping individual complainants in dealing with authorities, for example, we also monitor general issues and try to address shortcomings in a systemic way. This project has enabled us to test this approach vigorously," said the Defender, Stanislav Křeček.

"I believe it has also helped us prepare for further changes that the transformation of the Defender into a national human rights institution (NHRI) would entail. One of them is the very choice of the topics to address. Last autumn, we organised an [international roundtable](#) with our Norwegian partner on the possible establishment of a national human rights institution in the Czech Republic. Several participants emphasised the importance of prioritisation for institutions with a broad human rights protection mandate," said the Deputy Defender, Vít Alexander Schorm. He believes that long-term monitoring of selected areas is equally important.

The Public Defender of Rights already tried this working method and prioritisation in practice when he monitored the implementation of the right to equal treatment over the past four years. This has resulted in four monitoring reports (File Nos.: [62/2020/DIS](#), [89/2021/DIS](#), [16/2023/DIS](#) and [55/2023/DIS](#)) summarising the trends in selected areas, namely Roma education, equal pay for men and women, and some procedural issues.

In the reports, the Defender also pointed out, for example, that outdated diagnostics might not correctly distinguish between the innate intellectual abilities of Roma pupils and the influence of their environment. In his latest report, the Defender recommended that the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports encourage school counselling centres to make more frequent use of modern diagnostic tools.

"Norwegian funds have been supporting projects in the Czech Republic for twenty years. All programmes and pre-defined projects are the result of bilateral negotiations between the Czech and Norwegian governments. I am very pleased that the project 'Reinforcing the

activities of the Public Defender of Rights’ was supported during this period and contributed to improving the situation of some vulnerable and marginalised groups, such as people with disabilities and prisoners,” said Victor Conrad Rønneberg, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Norway in Prague, with regard to the project’s conclusion.

He also appreciates that the amendment to the Public Defender of Rights Act may now enable the establishment of a national human rights institution (NHRI) in the Czech Republic: *“Most European Union countries already have NHRIs as a solid part of their rule of law – it serves as an independent observer and advisor to governmental authorities. I firmly believe that this will lead to further systematic improvements in the area of human rights, also in the context of the recent challenges such as migration from Ukraine, ongoing discrimination against the Roma and the insufficiently addressed problem of domestic and sexual violence.”*

Brief statistics of the main outputs of the 2020–2023 project

We have issued:

- 20 reports on follow-up visits to facilities where people may be restricted in freedom;
- 8 recommendations concerning the protection of vulnerable children and their families;
- 4 monitoring reports on the implementation of the right to equal treatment in the areas of Roma education, equal pay for women and men and some procedural issues;
- 4 recommendations in the area of the right to equal treatment;

[Easy read version of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;](#)

[Children’s version of the Convention on the Rights of the Child;](#)

[Leaflet for children in educational institutions or children’s homes;](#)

Expert article [Vznik národní lidskoprávní instituce v České republice – v čem se lze inspirovat v Norsku?](#) (*Establishment of a national human rights institution in the Czech Republic – How can we draw inspiration from Norway?*)

We have prepared:

- 37 professional materials, such as legislative recommendations, comments and statements of the Public Defender of Rights;
- 7 videos for children called [#AničkaVloguje](#) (*Anička’s Vlog*) on the Defender’s mandate;
- 6 modules of an e-learning course titled [Introduction to Anti-Discrimination Law;](#)
- 5 research projects in the area of the right to equal treatment and follow-up workshops for experts and the public;

4 internal training sessions for the employees of the Defender's Office concerning human rights and constitutional perspectives in the work of the Office of the Public Defender of Rights;

Round table on *Clarity in public administration* for civil servants, judges and other experts;

[First Ombudsman conference for children;](#)

Meetings of three children's participation groups

We have trained:

326 professional employees of facilities where people restricted in their freedom are or may be present;

506 social sector workers;

An overview of project activities with links to the individual outputs is available as an annex to the press release or at

https://www.ochrance.cz/en/projekty/strengthening_the_public_defender_of_rights_activities_in_human_rights_protection/