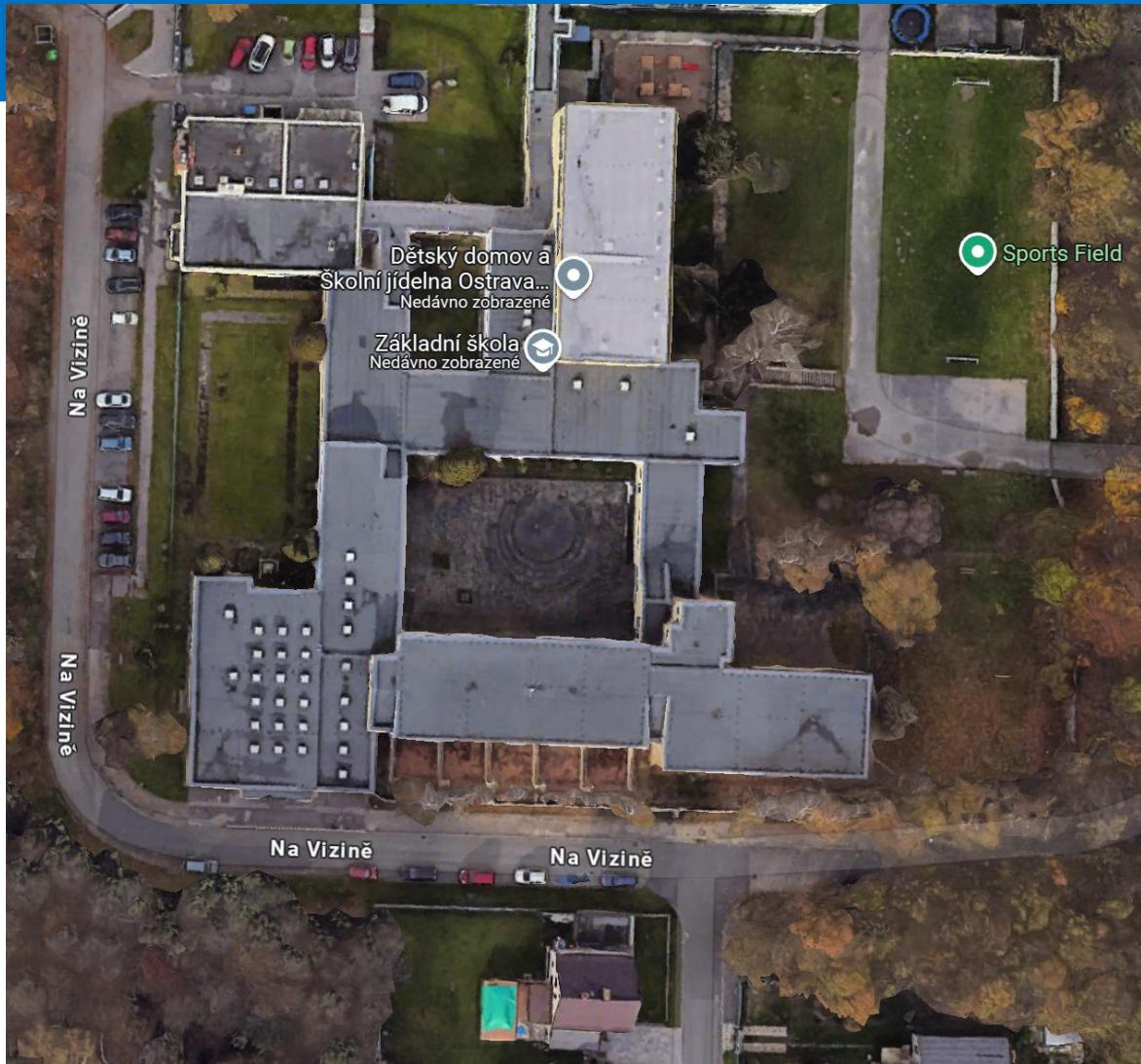


Fundamental rights violation in EU funds, Czechia



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FRONT COVER IMAGE – Merged segregated school and Children's Home

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Executive summary

This report provides a comprehensive examination of how European Union (EU) funds are allocated and utilized in the Czech Republic, particularly in relation to the most marginalized groups: Roma communities, individuals with disabilities, and migrants. Despite robust legal frameworks and declared commitments to antidiscrimination, the research uncovers entrenched systemic barriers ranging from segregated schooling for Roma children to inadequate support for people with disabilities and migrants. Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative methods, the study highlights how an absence of transparent oversight and accountability allows institutionalization and other exclusionary practices to persist, often under the guise of legitimate funding allocations.

Findings reveal widespread misuse of EU funds, including projects intended to promote Roma inclusion that instead finance segregated schools, institutional care centres, or infrastructure developments that displace marginalized families.

Ineffective monitoring mechanisms, compounded by a decentralized administrative system, further complicate efforts to enforce anti-discrimination principles. Interviews with affected communities, NGOs, and government representatives confirm that genuine transformation requires stronger oversight, direct involvement of grassroots organizations, and clear criteria for ensuring inclusivity in both educational and housing programs.

To address these systemic issues, the report offers targeted recommendations: more robust auditing of EU-funded initiatives, mandatory training on anti-discrimination principles for managing authorities, and formalized roles for community-led organizations in monitoring and project evaluation. By restructuring fund allocation processes and strengthening legal safeguards, EU resources can begin to fulfil their original mandate promoting equity, desegregation, and community-based support for all.

Introduction

Segregation of Romani children

The Czech Republic continues to face deep-seated challenges in combating systemic discrimination against marginalized groups. This research focuses on Roma children, individuals with disabilities, and migrants, particularly examining how European Union (EU) funds are allocated and whether they address or exacerbate inequities. By assessing the utilization of these funds, the study aims to identify and uncover systemic failures and propose actionable solutions for fostering inclusion and equity.

Roma segregation remains one of the most entrenched forms of systemic discrimination in the Czech Republic. According to the RCM Civil Society Monitoring Report 2019 (p. 18), despite legal obligations to promote integration, municipalities continue to fund segregated schools, reinforcing the cycle of exclusion. Despite the landmark 2007 *D.H. and Others v. Czech Republic* case, which condemned the overrepresentation of Roma children in special education programs, progress has been minimal.

Research confirms that Roma students continue to be funnelled into segregated schools or classes with reduced curricula. Residential segregation further compounds these educational and institutionalization challenges. Reports from the Amnesty International (page 14) indicate that many Roma families are deliberately relocated to isolated areas, reducing their access to quality schooling and employment opportunities. Confined to isolated settlements with poor infrastructure, families lack essential services that could prevent the removal of children to state institutions. Some EU-funded housing projects aimed at desegregation have failed to address these issues effectively because of inadequate design, limited oversight, and insufficient emphasis on community-led solutions.

Persisting Barriers for People with Disabilities

People with disabilities in the Czech Republic face significant barriers to accessing education, employment, and public services. One of the most pressing issues is the persistence of institutional care for people with disabilities, despite the government's official commitment to deinstitutionalization. As highlighted by many respondents, a considerable portion of EU funds allocated for disability inclusion has been mismanaged or directed toward projects that do not effectively address systemic challenges.

While the Czech government has pledged to shift away from institutional care towards community-based services, progress has been slow.

Many EU-funded projects intended for independent living instead go toward renovating large institutional facilities, reinforcing segregation rather than fostering genuine integration. Schools frequently lack the resources to provide adequate accommodations, resulting in the exclusion of disabled students from mainstream education. Families of disabled children interviewed for this research consistently report bureaucratic hurdles and insufficient support; they are often advised to place their children in specialized institutions rather than mainstream schools. Similar patterns are observable in the workplace. Despite the available EU funding for inclusive employment programs, businesses often fail to implement reasonable accommodation such as flexible work arrangements or accessible workplaces. Interviews with disability rights advocates confirm that a lack of awareness and poor oversight frequently prevent these funds from reaching intended beneficiaries. Furthermore, the slow pace of deinstitutionalization stands in stark contrast to the principles of the European Disability Strategy, raising concerns about whether EU funds are truly being used to promote independent living.

Discrimination Against Migrants and Refugees

Migrants and refugees, including Roma fleeing the war in Ukraine, face compounded discrimination in the Czech Republic. Interviews with Roma people reveal that Roma refugees were systematically placed in better case to overcrowded and poorly maintained shelters, in many cases left without any support sleeping on the concrete floor at train stations, while non-Roma refugees often receive preferential treatment. Upon arrival, many Ukrainian Roma were subjected to harsher living conditions, including placing them to detention centres behind barbed wire with inadequate sanitation and food supplies, highlighting profound inequalities in reception policies.

Discriminatory practices extend to education, where migrant children often face segregation or exclusion due to language barriers and insufficient support. Government policies routinely fail to provide equitable assistance for migrants, leaving grassroots organizations such as Awen Amerca or even poor Czech Roma to organize a charity collection to fill the gap.

Taken together, these issues reveal interconnected systems of exclusion that disproportionately affect society's most vulnerable groups. By examining whether EU funds are used to dismantle or reinforce these barriers, the study aims to offer a blueprint for more equitable policymaking and implementation in the Czech Republic.

Methodology of the research

Research objective

The research aims to investigate whether EU funds are being effectively utilized to promote inclusion and address systemic discrimination, or if inefficiencies and violations are undermining these objectives. A critical issue involves the challenge of obtaining accurate and honest information: project reports frequently display idealized outcomes, and institutions or implementers are often unwilling to acknowledge any shortcomings or abuses. Blighted Lives: Romani Children in State Care (p. X) highlights how official narratives can mask systemic issues around institutionalization particularly for Roma children making it even more vital to prioritize beneficiary perspectives over those of project implementers or government bodies.

One of the central questions of this study is whether EU funding should be paused or redirected when inefficiencies or misuse are evident, or if reforms in monitoring and implementation can ensure better outcomes.

By uncovering patterns of discrimination, identifying systemic barriers to equitable fund distribution, and proposing actionable recommendations, the study aims to optimize resource allocation and foster sustainable inclusion. Documenting best practices from successful projects is also crucial, offering models for replication across different regions and sectors.

This research seeks to bridge the gap between policy intentions and lived realities, paving the way for a more effective and equitable use of EU resources.

Key objectives include.

- Assessing the impact of EU-funded projects on Roma inclusion, disability rights, and migrant integration.
- Identifying systemic barriers to equitable resource allocation and utilization.
- Providing actionable recommendations to optimize the use of EU funds for sustainable inclusion.
-

Methodology

This study employs a robust mixed methods approach designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of systemic discrimination, ensuring a comprehensive

understanding of the challenges and opportunities within the framework of EU funded initiatives. We conducted a quantitative survey, completing 160 questionnaires in total from civil society, Roma, migrant and disabled people, 8 Civil society organizations, four public authority actors (e.g., national managing authorities), and six independent experts. In parallel, we conducted ten in depth, semi structured interviews with four representatives of national authorities, 8 NGO practitioners and four local experts, to surface lived experience insights. The research prioritizes the voices of beneficiaries, triangulating these primary data with existing studies to ensure both breadth and depth of understanding.

Literature Review

An extensive review of primary documents forms the backbone of this research, offering insights into systemic discrimination, EU fund allocation, and Roma, disability, and migrant rights in the Czech Republic. Key sources include:

Quantitative analysis

Quantitative methods offer measurable insights into disparities and systemic issues. This component involves:

Discrimination of Roma:

- Blighted Lives: Romani Children in State Care Highlights systemic issues related to the institutionalization of Roma children.
- RCM Civil Society Monitoring Report 2019: Cited extensively, covering segregation in schools, housing discrimination, and misuse of EU funds allocated for Roma integration.
- RCM Civil Society Monitoring Report 2017: Describes earlier systemic discrimination patterns, especially educational segregation.
- Notes on the Treatment of Roma from Ukraine: Describes differential and discriminatory treatment of Roma refugees from Ukraine compared to non-Roma refugees.
- EGESIF 15-0024-00-GN Segregation (EU guidance): EU document guiding the use of structural funds to combat segregation.
- This Year It Has Been 17 Years Since the Judgment D.H: Reflects on the historic D.H. and Others v. Czech Republic judgment concerning Roma children's segregation.
- 25.01.24 Report on Ongoing Segregation in the Czech Republic: Provides updated information and case studies on current segregation trends.
- D.H. and Others v. Czech Republic (2007) (ECHR judgment): Landmark European Court of Human Rights case on Roma segregation in education.
- National Roma Integration Strategy (SRI): Main national strategy addressing Roma exclusion and integration in housing, education, and employment.

Rights of Disabled People:

- RCM Civil Society Monitoring Report 2017: Discusses mismanagement and misdirection of EU funds intended for disability inclusion and independent living, with emphasis on institutionalization issues.
- OP VVV (Operational Programme Research, Development and Education): Mentioned concerning EU-funded projects involving overlaps in financing between educational facilities and institutions for disabled people, which perpetuate segregation and undermine deinstitutionalization.

Rights of Migrants:

- RCM Civil Society Monitoring Report 2019: Addresses discriminatory conditions faced by Roma migrants and refugees, particularly those fleeing Ukraine, highlighting disparities in living conditions, integration opportunities, and systemic biases in support policies.
- Notes on the Treatment of Roma from Ukraine: Explicitly covers discriminatory practices in housing and integration support for Roma migrants fleeing Ukraine, compared to non-Roma refugees.

These references provide the primary backbone of evidence used throughout the Czech country report, clearly categorized by each targeted thematic area.

List of participating organisations

This research has been enriched by the contributions of multiple organizations; each offering specialized insights and methods to combat systemic discrimination and promote genuine inclusion.

- **Awen Amenca:** A leading grassroots organization focused on Roma community organizing and advocacy. Awen Amenca adapts community-organizing methodologies from the Harvard Kennedy School, emphasizing leadership development and empowerment within marginalized communities.
- **Romodrom:** A non-governmental organization dedicated to improving the living conditions of Roma communities through education, housing, and social services initiatives.
- **Agape:** Offers support to marginalized groups, including Roma refugees from Ukraine, providing emergency assistance, integration programs, and policy advocacy.
- **Romea:** A media and advocacy organization elevating Roma voices and raising public awareness of Roma rights and issues.
- **IQ Roma servis:** Actively engaged in community development and advocacy to promote Roma inclusion in education, employment, and public life.
- **Slovo 21:** Advocates for Roma rights through cultural projects, policy advocacy, and community organizing initiatives.
- These organizations have played critical roles in data collection, community engagement, and policy advocacy, ensuring that the research reflects the real-life experiences of marginalized groups and does not rely solely on official narratives.

Experts Involved

The research team comprises sociologists, legal experts, and education specialists with experience in anti-discrimination policies and EU fund monitoring. Input was also sought from members of the Ombudsperson's office and other subject- matter specialists, further strengthening the validity and scope of the study.

Stakeholders Consulted

Various stakeholders have contributed to the research, including:

- Representatives from government bodies
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
- Educational institutions
- Grassroots organizations
- The Ombudsperson's office
- Czech School Inspectorate
- Municipality officials

Their perspectives and firsthand accounts provide a multifaceted view of the obstacles facing migrants and refugees particularly Roma refugees from Ukraine as well as the critical need for coordinated community- driven interventions.

Roma discrimination

- Council of Europe – Roma and Travelers website (demographics, context)
- EU Roma Strategic Framework for equality, inclusion and participation 2020–2030
- 2023 EC Assessment Report on national Roma strategic frameworks (fiches part 1)
- Fighting school segregation in Europe through inclusive education (EEG/COE)
- CADO report on monitoring school segregation (Romania, 2022)

Rights of disabled people

- Community Living / Structural Funds Watch (2017 report)
- Community Living / Structural Funds Watch (2018 report)
- ENIL “EU Funds for our rights” campaign
- Validity Foundation “Straightjackets and seclusion” report
- Validity Foundation complaint on Romania & Estonia (2020)
- FRA 2018 “Community Living” analysis
- European Ombudsman inquiry into disability related EU funds (OI/8/2014/AN)
- UN CRPD Committee Concluding Observations on Bulgaria

Rights of migrants

- European Ombudsman inquiry into EU funded migration centres in Greece
- PICUM & ECRE “Rights and EU funds” policy note (March 2023)
- Lighthouse Reports: Unmasking Europe’s shadow armies
- Human Rights Watch letter on Italian migrant worker camps
- AIDA (Asylum Information Database) Greece country report
- Eurostat – migrant population statistics
- Structured Data Collection: A standardized questionnaire targets organizations, policymakers, and beneficiaries to gather numerical data on project implementation and resource allocation, and impact.
- Data Analysis Tools: Microsoft Excel and SPSS are used to categorize and interpret collected data.
- Results Presentation: Graphs, charts, and explanatory narratives highlight patterns, gaps, and correlations in the management of EU-funded projects.

Qualitative Interviews

Semi-structured interviews provide a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of those directly affected by systemic discrimination:

- Participant Selection: Roma families, individuals with disabilities, and migrants, including those who have experienced institutionalization or faced barriers to community-based services.
- Interview Structure: Each session starts with a brief quantitative questionnaire to capture baseline data, followed by open-ended questions to explore nuanced viewpoints. Data Coding and Analysis: Responses are transcribed and coded using thematic analysis, enabling identification of recurring themes and unique insights. Institutionalization Focus: Given the findings in Blighted Lives: Romani Children in State Care, special attention is paid to uncovering how institutional biases and lack of community support shape the experiences of Romani children and their families.

Selections of project examples

Project examples facilitate an in-depth exploration of specific EU-funded projects, illustrating both successes and failures. At least ten projects across three thematic areas Roma inclusion, disability rights, and refugee integration are examined.

Evaluation Criteria: Each case study assesses the project's objectives, design, and outcomes, focusing on compliance with anti-discrimination principles and the extent of community

participation. **Field Visits and Stakeholder Consultations:** Where possible, on-site visits and local stakeholder interviews verify official reports and uncover discrepancies akin to those highlighted in *Blighted Lives: Romani Children in State Care*.

Documentation: Each project example details the fund type, beneficiary, budget, year of implementation, target group, scope of violation, and locality, providing a transparent record of both achievements and shortcomings.

Rationale for a Mixed-Methods Approach

By combining these three methods quantitative analysis, qualitative interviews, and case studies the research ensures that findings are both data-driven and grounded in the realities of marginalized communities. This comprehensive strategy is vital for capturing complexities often omitted from official accounts. Many institutions point out, reliance solely on institutional or project-level data can misrepresent on-the-ground conditions, especially concerning children in state care and other hard-to-access groups. Therefore, prioritizing beneficiary perspectives and conducting on-site verifications help to mitigate these informational blind spots.

Therefore, prioritizing beneficiary perspectives and conducting on-site verifications help to mitigate these informational blind spots.

In sum, this mixed-methods design equips the research to offer a nuanced understanding of how effectively EU funds are used to combat systemic discrimination and where critical reforms are needed to ensure that resource allocation truly fosters equity and inclusion.

Timeline of research implementation

The research spans a structured 6-month period. The initial phase focuses on data collection and stakeholder engagement, followed by detailed analysis and synthesis of findings.

Target group	Systemic challenges
<i>Roma</i>	Segregated education, substandard housing, and systemic exclusion
<i>People with disabilities</i>	Lack of accessibility in education and workplaces; insufficient support services.
<i>Migrants and refugees</i>	Legal barriers, linguistic exclusion, and limited access to integration programs.

Analysis of the main thematic areas

Roma communities

Roma communities in the Czech Republic remain one of the most marginalized groups, facing entrenched systemic barriers in education, housing, and employment. Despite legislative efforts to promote inclusion, many Roma children are disproportionately placed in special education programs or segregated schools. These practices perpetuate cycles of poverty and social exclusion, denying Roma children equal opportunities to achieve academic and professional success. In housing, Roma families often reside in segregated settlements characterized by substandard conditions and limited access to infrastructure and services.

The work of Awen Amenca underscores the transformative power of community organizing in challenging these systemic injustices. By collaborating directly with Roma families, the organization has empowered parents to advocate for equitable educational opportunities. Grassroots campaigns for inclusive school enrolment and community-led initiatives to enhance living conditions demonstrate how local engagement can drive meaningful change. Blighted Lives: Romani Children in State Care further illustrates that, without robust community-based advocacy, essential data on the everyday realities of Roma exclusion especially where institutionalization of children is concerned remains obscured by overly optimistic official reporting.

Roma inclusion thus remains a critical challenge, characterized by persistent segregation in both schools and housing. Despite legal mandates for desegregation, many children continue to be funnelled into special education or placed in segregated classrooms. Residential segregation compounds these educational inequities, as Roma families in isolated settlements often lack adequate infrastructure and basic services. EU-funded projects intended to address these challenges have shown mixed outcomes: while some demonstrate a genuine commitment to dismantling segregation, others inadvertently reinforce existing divides, reflecting the need for stringent oversight and genuine community participation (EGESIF 15-0024-00-GN Segregation).

By focusing on grassroots mobilization and centering the voices of Roma families, organizations like Awen Amenca highlight the gap between top-down policy intentions and lived experiences. Their work confirms that community-driven approaches, rather than purely institutional solutions, are pivotal for ensuring that Roma children gain equal access to quality education, decent housing, and genuine opportunities for social advancement.

People with Disabilities

People with disabilities in the Czech Republic continue to face significant barriers to quality education, inclusive employment, and accessible housing.

In education, schools often lack adequate resources to provide reasonable accommodations, which results in the exclusion of disabled students from mainstream education. Similarly, workplaces frequently fail to implement necessary adjustments, such as flexible working hours or physical accessibility improvements, thereby restricting the economic participation and independence of individuals with disabilities.

Although the European Union funds initiatives aimed at promoting inclusive practices, insufficient oversight and institutional biases often undermine these objectives. Inadequate management of EU-funded programs can unintentionally reinforce exclusionary models, affecting especially those who experience intersectional discrimination, such as individuals who are both Roma and disabled.

Awen Amena's community-organizing approach has been instrumental in advocating for the rights of people with disabilities, especially concerning deinstitutionalization. By promoting leadership within disabled communities, the organization ensures that individuals directly impacted by these barriers are included in policy discussions and decision-making processes. Through workshops, awareness-raising campaigns, and direct advocacy, Awen Amena emphasizes the necessity of inclusive education, accessible public spaces, and the transition from institutional care to community-based services. These grassroots initiatives align closely with recommendations from "Blighted Lives," highlighting the negative consequences of isolating vulnerable groups in institutional settings.

Through community-driven engagement, Awen Amena and similar organizations have effectively identified and addressed systemic barriers, working towards genuine inclusion and independent living for people with disabilities.

Their work not only sheds light on the persistent lack of infrastructure and accommodation but also demonstrates the value of empowering marginalized communities to articulate their own needs. By centering the experiences of those most affected, these efforts reaffirm that sustainable inclusion requires more than top-down policies; it demands active participation and leadership from disabled individuals, ensuring that both educational and employment settings become genuinely accessible for all.

Migrants and refugees

Migrants and refugees, including Roma fleeing conflict in Ukraine, encounter compounded challenges related to legal status, language barriers, and societal discrimination. Many migrant children face segregation in schools or are excluded altogether due to insufficient linguistic and cultural support. Housing policies further marginalize these communities by relegating them to overcrowded or otherwise unsuitable living conditions, often with limited or no access to essential services. Grassroots organizations such as Awen Amenca have been vital in addressing the unique needs of these communities. By building trust through language programs, legal aid, and advocacy efforts, the organization helps migrant families navigate complex bureaucratic systems and secure vital resources. These community-driven initiatives act as a crucial lifeline for many migrants who would otherwise be excluded from institutional support networks. Indeed, *Blighted Lives: Romani Children in State Care* underscores how a lack of culturally sensitive, community-based approaches can lead to forms of institutionalization that disproportionately affect marginalized groups, including migrants and refugees.

Without initiative-taking interventions, the systemic exclusion and de facto segregation of migrants would remain invisible in official reporting.

One significant issue that has emerged in recent years is the discriminatory treatment of Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic, particularly regarding ethnicity and skin colour. While non-Roma Ukrainian refugees often receive more immediate and adequate support, Roma refugees face markedly harsher living conditions. This disparity reveals systemic biases consistent with broader ethnic discrimination trends within the country. Recent reports have documented the dire conditions experienced by Ukrainian Roma refugees. In Ostrava, for instance, 150 Roma families have been placed in an old detention centre surrounded by high walls and barbed wire. Although necessities beds, food, and water are provided, the facility closely resembles a prison rather than a temporary refuge. The situation in Brno is even more alarming: Roma refugees there have been forced to live in tented camps without flooring, resulting in unsafe and unsanitary conditions. Families must sleep on wet mud with limited access to food, clean water, or functioning sanitation facilities.

Literature review

The quantitative findings show the persistent and enduring disparities in education, housing, and employment affecting Roma, individuals with disabilities, and migrants in the Czech Republic. Statistical analyses and recent data illuminate the systemic nature of exclusion, revealing the following trends:

Education

Overrepresentation in Special Education: As of 2022, 22% of children in special classes within mainstream schools were Roma, while 15% of children in special schools were Roma. This contrasts sharply with the general population, where only 3% of children require specialized educational arrangements. This discrepancy indicates systemic biases in diagnostic testing and placement procedures.

Despite legislative reforms, the proportion of schools with large Roma populations remains high. Schools with more than 50% Roma enrolment have shown minimal improvement, with an increase from 1.6% to 1.8% between 2019/2020 and 2020/2021.

Local Examples: In Kutna Hora, most Roma children attend just two segregated schools. In other municipalities, a considerable number of Roma students are placed in the “practical” track originally intended for children with disabilities even when such placements are unwarranted. This trend reflects systemic biases and discriminatory practices in educational decision-making.

Graduation Rates: Roma children’s graduation rates remain below 15%, compared to over 70% for non-Roma peers, further illustrating the long-term impact of segregation and substandard schooling.

Housing

Segregated Settlements and the Illusion of Progress: Roma families in the Czech Republic continue to reside in segregated settlements that often lack basic infrastructure such as running water, sewage, or paved roads. These conditions severely limit their access to essential services, quality education, and formal employment opportunities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and exclusion. Between 2008 and 2015, the number of socially excluded localities (SVL) more than doubled, as documented in the comprehensive document *Analýza sociálně vyloučených lokalit v ČR* (MPSV/GAC, 2015). Despite this alarming trend, subsequent years saw

a puzzling shift: rather than intensifying efforts to address the root causes, the government discontinued systematic counting and mapping of SVL altogether.

This policy shift occurred in parallel with significant public and EU-funded investments aimed at combating exclusion, including urban renewal programs, social housing projects, and employment schemes. These efforts are described in documents such as the Strategie sociálního začleňování 2021–2030 (MPSV, 2021) and reports by the Agentura pro sociální začleňování, but have produced limited measurable impact, particularly because they often fail to address structural drivers of spatial segregation—such as discriminatory housing practices, exclusion from the private rental market, and municipal zoning policies. The issue is further complicated by the absence of updated, transparent data, which severely limits accountability and strategic planning.

Institutionalization

Concerns Overlap of Schools and Children’s Homes: NGOs and experts have flagged a lack of transparency regarding EU-funded projects linked to both schools and adjacent children’s homes.

In line with findings from Blighted Lives: Romani Children in State Care (p. X), many fear these funds may reinforce institutional care rather than support deinstitutionalization.

Persistent Model of Segregation: The use of institutional care not only slows the transition toward community-based services but also perpetuates segregation, contradicting EU policies that promote inclusive education and family-based care.

Employment

High Unemployment Rates: Among Roma communities, unemployment frequently surpasses 60%, compared to a 3% national average. This stark discrepancy underscores the limited effectiveness of EU-funded employment initiatives.

Migrants and Refugees

Compounded Challenges: Migrants and refugees, including Roma refugees from Ukraine, contend with language barriers, discriminatory policies, and insufficient integration programs.

Exclusion in Education: Quantitative data show that many migrant children are either excluded from educational institutions or placed in segregated settings, hindering their full integration into Czech society.

These findings above highlight a systemic pattern of exclusion that urgently demands stronger oversight and antidiscrimination strategies. Stakeholders have voiced particular concern over how EU funding is allocated, noting that opaque project structures and inadequate monitoring can enable segregationist practices.

As *Blighted Lives: Romani Children in State Care* makes clear, a lack of clarity around resource distribution can effectively prop up existing institutional models that do not align with the principle of inclusion. Targeted policy interventions, enhanced transparency in fund allocation, and active community engagement stand out as key mechanisms for reversing these trends. Only by taking decisive action can the Czech Republic ensure that EU-funded projects fulfil their mandate to promote equity and inclusion for Roma communities, individuals with disabilities, and migrants alike.

Findings of qualitative interviews

The qualitative component of this research relied on in-depth interviews with Roma families, individuals with disabilities, migrants, and key stakeholders, including representatives from the Ombudsman's office and fundamental rights bodies. Although anti-discrimination principles are embedded in EU-funded projects, interview data strongly suggest that implementation on the ground remains deeply flawed. Institutional actors often obscure how funds are actually allocated, making testimonies from affected communities the most reliable source of information.

While some positive examples of desegregation in education have emerged over the past decade—many of which were supported or directly facilitated by Awen Amenca—there is a stark contrast when it comes to residential desegregation, where no project with tangible, systemic impact can be identified. On the contrary, some housing initiatives have inadvertently reinforced exclusion by formalizing ghettos or improving isolated settlements without offering pathways to spatial integration. The result is a deepening illusion of progress in public policy, while on the ground, the cycle of exclusion continues—too often out of sight and out of data.

A recurring concern raised during interviews is institutionalization, particularly in the context of children's homes that share facilities or administrative links with local schools. This close integration blurs the lines between EU funding for schools, children's homes, or both. NGOs and experts worry that EU funds indirectly support institutional care rather than promoting deinstitutionalization, as formally intended. *Blighted Lives: Romani Children in State Care* echoes this concern, highlighting systemic biases that disproportionately channel Roma children and other marginalized groups into institutional settings.

Roma parents voiced extensive fears regarding child protection offices, citing repeated threats of forcibly removing their children for placement in institutions. Interviewees noted a stark contrast: whereas most non-Roma children in state care tend to be orphans or genuinely abandoned, Roma children are frequently placed there after being forcibly removed from their families. These practices not only perpetuate cycles of discrimination and segregation but also align with findings in *Blighted Lives: Romani Children in State Care* (p. X), which documents how insufficient oversight and systemic biases lead to an overrepresentation of Roma minors in state care.

Interviews with Roma families also emphasized the widespread routing of Roma children into segregated schools or special education programs. Parents reported that local schools often justified this under the pretext of “tailored learning approaches,” despite EU funding aimed at desegregation (RCM Civil Society Monitoring Report 2019, p. 21). NGOs corroborated these accounts, noting that some EU-funded “inclusion” initiatives ironically reinforced segregation by channelling resources into separate facilities rather than mainstream educational environments.

Interviews with disability rights activists and individuals with disabilities confirmed that EU funds designated for workplace accessibility and social integration often fail to translate into tangible improvements.

Multiple respondents recounted participating in EU-funded vocational training programs yet remaining unable to secure employment. Representatives from the Ombudsman's office observed that while funding for inclusion exists, many employers either lack awareness of available resources or are unwilling to implement meaningful accessibility measures (RCM Civil Society Monitoring Report 2017, p. 19). Migrant and refugee support programs face parallel obstacles. Roma refugees from Ukraine described being relegated to overcrowded, substandard shelters, whereas non-Roma Ukrainian refugees received superior housing assistance. Local NGOs attributed these discrepancies to weak oversight in EU-funded refugee support programs, enabling discriminatory distribution of resources. The Ombudsman's office acknowledged that existing complaint mechanisms are inadequate for effectively addressing such issues (RCM Civil Society Monitoring Report 2019, pp. 19, 12).

Taken together, these interviews highlight a significant gap between the intended purpose of EU-funded anti-discrimination projects and their real-world impact. While institutional reports often present an idealized narrative, grassroots organizations and beneficiaries reveal that

these projects frequently fail to produce meaningful change. This underscores the urgent need for stronger oversight mechanisms and enhanced community-led involvement in both project design and evaluation.

Project examples of fundamental rights violations

Research findings have uncovered multiple instances where municipal actions and local policies contradict the National Roma Integration Strategy (SRI) and misalign with the intended goals of EU funds. Instead of fostering inclusion, these measures often reinforce segregation and perpetuate discrimination. Below are some representative examples:

Housing Discrimination in Usti nad Labem

The municipality of Usti nad Labem implemented several projects aimed at Roma integration with the support of ESF+, and Resilience and Recovery Funds. One of the projects , nr. CZ.03.2.63/0.0/0.0/16_063/0006583 was implemented from 1.9.2017 – 30.9.2018 aiming to create a new Community Plan to make social integration more effective.

Articles violated: Article 21 (Non-discrimination); Article 34 (Right to Housing)

In the scope of these project, Roma families were relocated from central urban areas to segregated parts of the city, with limited access to essential services, such as education, and employment. No desegregation measures were implemented; instead, newly vacated central areas were redeveloped for commercial or high-income housing. This approach violates rights for decent quality housing, represent discriminative treatment and hinders integration of Roma communities in the mainstream society.

Also, article 1,3,4,7, 21 and 24 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights

Funding: ESF, 1 032 431,25 CZK (co- finance)

Actions taken: No action taken.

EU Funds used to reinforce educational segregation in Ostrava

Between 2016 and 2019, was allocated 178,54 mil. CZK to the project Development of Equal Access to Education I. II. and III in the city of Ostrava (29 primary schools involved). While the project's stated goal was to ensure equal access to quality education, its outcomes were misaligned with this objective. Instead of promoting inclusion, the project contributed to the further segregation of Roma communities. Notably, both the number of segregated Romani children and school dropouts increased during this period

Project registration nr. : CZ.02.3.61/0.0/0.0/15_007/0000212

Articles violated:

- **Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights** (Prohibition of Discrimination)
- **Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 to the European Convention on Human Rights** (Right to Education)

The Czech Republic was urged by the European Court of Human Rights in the D.H. and Others v. Czech Republic case (2007) to end the segregation of Romani children in education. Despite this binding judgment, segregation practices persist.

Moreover, EU funds are explicitly designed to comply with this requirement, supporting inclusive education and combating all forms of discrimination as part of the EU's legal obligations and funding conditionalities. Failure to meet these obligations may constitute a violation of EU funding rules and principles of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

This ongoing segregation especially in Ostrava, highlights serious failures in ensuring that EU funding complies with the EU's anti-discrimination framework. Monitoring and enforcement mechanisms proved inadequate, allowing this misuse of funds to continue unchecked. Compounding the problem, some municipal officials openly denied the existence of segregated schools, despite unmistakable evidence. This institutional denial obstructed meaningful reform, made it impossible to reallocate resources effectively, and prevented accountability for the misuse of EU funds.

Funding: European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), Operational Programme Research, Development and Education.

In January 2012, the European Commission halted the disbursement of approximately €1.9 million in structural funds to the Czech Republic after identifying "serious shortcomings" in the management and control of monies intended for education projects. This action was taken due to concerns that the funds were not being used effectively to promote inclusive education for Romani children. (https://fpa.org/fair-deal-czech-roma-start-decent-schools/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

This project clearly reflects practices consistently criticized by the European Commission. Despite repeated warnings, the same exclusionary approach continues.

Discrimination of Romani people in housing in Kladno

The municipality of Kladno introduced a local decree in 2017, which severely limited access to social and housing benefits in the whole territory of Kladno ("no-supplement zone"). The Regional Authority of the Central Bohemian Region annulled this decree in 2019. As a result, the city will now be required to identify specific locations where new residents will be ineligible for housing supplements, while those already living in the affected areas will retain their benefits. Due to the decree high number of families lost their homes and became homeless overnight. Even though the decree was eventually declared invalid, no compensation was provided to the victims. The municipality of Kladno started in 2017 implementing projects funded by EU funds at the time when the local decree was still in place. One of them is a project implemented under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs called the systemic support of social work in municipalities (**CZ. 03.2.63/0.0/0.0/15_017/0003527**), aiming to enhance social integration and combat poverty.

Articles violated: Article 21 (Non-discrimination); Article 34 (Right to Housing)

These projects aimed at integration of Roma communities, but simultaneously enforced unlawful practices, which represented discriminative practices against Roma and other socially vulnerable groups. In this way, EU funded measures indirectly supported discriminative practices.

Funding: ESF, Operational Programme Employment (the amount could not be found)

Actions taken: In 2019, The Regional Authority of the Central Bohemian Region annulled this decree because this decree was not contradicting the law, thus was considered as unlawful.

Primary school and children's home Na Vizine + several localities, Czechia Rights violated:

I. Violation of the Child's Right to Family Life and Community-Based Care

Legal Basis:

- Article 24 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (Rights of the Child)
- Article 7 of the Charter (Right to Private and Family Life)
- Article 19 CRPD (Right to Independent Living and Inclusion in the Community)
- Articles 3, 9, and 20 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Argument: The merger of children's homes with segregated primary schools creates **camouflaged institutional settings**, making it difficult to identify and monitor institutional care environments. This violates the child's right to grow up in a family environment and access community-based care. Such arrangements blatantly ignore the **best interests of the child** principle (CRC Art. 3) and reinforce their long-term social exclusion.

II. Circumvention of Funding Restrictions and Legal Safeguards

Legal Basis: EU Regulation (Common Provisions Regulation – CPR) Art. 9(c): Prohibits the use of EU funds for institutional care that segregates individuals from the community.

- Council Directive 2000/43/EC (Racial Equality Directive): Prohibits both direct and indirect racial discrimination.

Argument:

Merging children's homes with a **segregated primary school, predominantly attended by Roma children**, exploits a legal loophole to access EU and public funds that are otherwise restricted for institutional care. Presenting such facilities as education-focused institutions enables **fraudulent misuse of funding streams** while perpetuating racial segregation, violating both the purpose of EU funds and anti-discrimination laws.

III. Structural Discrimination and Perpetuation of Racial Segregation

Legal Basis:

- Article 21 of the Charter (Non-Discrimination)
- ECHR Article 14 in conjunction with Article 8 (as established in *D.H. and Others v. Czech Republic*)
- EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025

Argument:

The practice disproportionately affects **Romani children**, both within the institutional care system and the segregated primary school. This dual segregation leads to a **closed, parallel system of education and care**, fundamentally violating the principles of equality and non-discrimination under EU law. It reproduces cycles of poverty, marginalization, and exclusion, constituting a clear case of **institutionalized racism**.

IV. Lack of Transparency and Public Oversight

Legal Basis: Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, Article 41 (Right to Good Administration)

- European Ombudsman's Code of Good Administrative Behaviour

Argument:

The merged status of these institutions obscures their true function, **hindering public authorities and independent bodies from effectively monitoring violations of children's rights and anti-discrimination safeguards**. This lack of transparency obstructs the proper enforcement of deinstitutionalization policies and EU funding conditionalities.

Funding: European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), Operational Programme Research, Development and Education. This funding is applicable to all the examples across the Czech Republic.

Actions taken: None, since most of these projects are portrayed as projects targeting integration and inclusion. None the less, the impact of these institutions is segregation, thus constituting discrimination. However, nobody is aware of the fact due to many reasons and one of them is lack of ethnically desegregated data collection.

Evictions and Relocations of Roma for Private Development

In the scope of urban regeneration, a private company Residomo (later renamed Heimstaden),

Articles violated: Article 21 (Non-discrimination); Article 34 (Right to Housing)

implemented EU funds projects, which resulted in relocation of Roma families to isolated, segregated areas, with limited access to public services. The urban regeneration project aimed at “improving living conditions,” but it resulted in eviction of Roma families from the Roma neighbourhood and selling the renovated flats to high-income buyers.

The project contributed to increasing private property values and resulted to evictions of marginalised Roma communities, which represent, discriminative treatment and violation of fundamental rights. (The new flats completely inaccessible for Roma families, <https://www.heimstaden.cz/v-zahradkach>).

Funding: 370 million CZK in total, 41 million CZK from ESF+ Funds

Actions taken: No



The locality in 2011 (Photo from Google maps)



Locality in 2023 after the eviction of all Roma families

Agency for Social Inclusion

Despite its mandate to promote equal opportunities and Roma inclusion, multiple reports indicate that the Agency for Social Inclusion has struggled to address structural discrimination effectively. Over time, the Agency has shifted from a focus on Roma inclusion to broader social disadvantage. While inclusive, this pivot enables the Agency to obtain automatic EU funding for Roma-focused initiatives without guaranteeing that Roma communities are actively involved in decision-making or benefit tangibly from these funds exceeding fifty million euros per year.

As the number of socially excluded localities in the Czech Republic has skyrocketed from 300 in 2008 to 600 in 2019 and continues to rise tens of millions of Euros allocated for “Roma integration” appear to yield minimal results. Interviewed Roma and civil society groups criticize the Agency for lacking meaningful engagement and failing to ensure the transparent, effective disbursement of EU resources to the intended beneficiaries.

The critique of Agency for Social Integration is coming also from The Supreme Audit Office (SAO), who in audit no. 23/29, warned that the Agency for Social Inclusion’s (ASZ) project-financing approach is unsystematic and short-term, which limits its ability to respond flexibly to emerging needs, and that most funds are devoted to personnel costs without delivering sufficient measurable impact. The audit also found that ASZ is involved in projects totalling more than 12 billion Euros. (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t_t-q3L21gZ2RVVWRJ_gN1lxMLUJ5Y38/view).

Key takeaways of the research

Entrenched Segregation

Weak oversight allows EU funds to be funneled into projects that reinforce rather than challenge segregation. Examples include funding for segregated Roma schools and institutional care centres, rather than community-based solutions.

Administrative Manoeuvres

Merging schools with children's homes is a deliberate strategy to secure additional funding streams. This approach not only entrenches institutionalization as documented in Blighted Lives but also obscures accountability in the distribution and use of funds.

Failure in monitoring mechanisms

Decentralized Oversight: Because the system is highly decentralized, tracking the real impact of EU-funded projects is difficult. Role of Community Organizations: Grassroots groups have been pivotal in exposing fund misuses that official reports often overlook. Their direct engagement with marginalized communities reveals gaps in compliance with anti-discrimination principles.

Inequality in Refugee Support

Double Standard: Research shows stark inequities in the treatment of Roma refugees (particularly from Ukraine) compared to non-Roma refugees, resulting in poorer housing conditions and limited services. This was often presented by Roma respondents as a manifestation of deep-rooted systemic discrimination that persists across Europe. Roma respondents expressed fear and insecurity after witnessing the differential treatment of Romani refugees from Ukraine. Some respondents drew disturbing parallels to historical atrocities, comparing the segregation they witnessed at Czech train stations to the sorting of people at Auschwitz train stations. They described seeing white Ukrainian refugees directed to hotels and proper housing while Roma Ukrainians were sent to detention centres surrounded by barbed wire and former prisons. These experiences led Czech Roma to realize their own vulnerability should similar circumstances arise in their country, heightening their sense of precarity and distrust in institutional protections.

Policy recommendations

Urgent need for reform

These concrete examples ranging from forced evictions in Usti nad Labem and Ostrava to the embedding of children's homes within segregated schools emphasize the urgent need for systemic reforms in housing, education, and employment.

They also underscore the importance of more robust oversight of EU-funded programs to guarantee compliance with anti-discrimination principles and deinstitutionalization objectives. Involving Roma organizations and communities in both decision-making and evaluation processes is critical for ensuring that policies and programs align with equity and inclusion principles, as advocated by the National Roma Integration Strategy (SRI). Such involvement would also help counter the manipulative use of EU funds that entrenches segregation rather than dismantling it. Recommendations and Action Plan The findings in this report underscore persistent challenges in achieving fair, non- discriminatory allocation of EU funds in the Czech Republic.

Despite policy commitments and legal frameworks aimed at fostering Roma inclusion, disability rights, and migrant integration, systemic barriers continue to impair the effective use of EU resources. Segregation, funding misallocation, and weak oversight all contribute to reinforcing, rather than dismantling, structural discrimination.

Moving forward, any sustainable solution must include:

1. Enhanced Oversight Mechanisms
2. Transparent Allocation Criteria
3. Direct Involvement of Affected Communities
4. Rigorous Monitoring and Evaluation

In line with the SRI and EU anti-discrimination standards, these steps are necessary to ensure that publicly funded projects genuinely advance equity and inclusion, rather than reproducing long-standing injustices.

A key barrier to effectively implementing anti-discrimination measures within EU-funded projects is the lack of awareness and understanding among managing authorities and ministries. Although public authorities often highlight anti-discrimination policies, decentralization and the absence of robust oversight mean these policies may be conducted in ways that unintentionally perpetuate discrimination.

Misuse of Funds: Interviews revealed that EU resources intended for Roma inclusion have been diverted to segregated schools, thereby maintaining or expanding segregated educational settings (RCM Civil Society Monitoring Report 2019, p. 21).

Contradicting Deinstitutionalization: EU funds have also been allocated for institutional care centres, rather than community-based alternatives, contradicting the EU's commitments to deinstitutionalization. **Blighted Lives: Romani Children in State Care** (p. X) underscores how such practices can cement exclusionary models.

Strengthening control mechanisms

- Mandatory Training: Ministries and managing authorities should undergo compulsory training on anti-discrimination laws and EU funding guidelines.
- Independent Monitoring Bodies: Roma- and disability-led organizations must be formally included in evaluating funded projects. This will ensure that community perspectives will be considered.
- Transparency and Accountability: Clear structures for reporting and accountability must be institutionalized so that funds are used to combat rather than reinforce discrimination.

Community engagement

Findings from focus groups and interviews confirm that data on institutional care and EU fund allocations are frequently obscured, making compliance with anti-discrimination standards difficult to verify. Direct engagement with those most affected Roma families, disability rights activists, and migrant advocacy groups is critical to exposing the true impact of EU-funded initiatives.

Discrepancy Between Paper and Practice: Many EU-funded projects are described as successful in official documentation but fail to deliver meaningful impact on the ground.

Local Success in Ostrava Poruba: Community involvement led to desegregating schools and addressed discriminatory practices in policy implementation. In collaboration with groups like Awen Amenca, Roma families successfully challenged segregation policies, underscoring the power of grassroots advocacy.

Awen Amenca, Romodrom, and similar organizations demonstrate that community-led monitoring is effective at uncovering violations that official channels often miss. Funding structures should therefore prioritize grassroots initiatives actively involving Roma, migrants, and people with disabilities to ensure that projects genuinely align with their needs and rights.

Funding reforms

To curb the misuse of EU funds, clear guidelines for evaluating compliance with antidiscrimination laws must be established. These guidelines should be consistent with the National Roma Integration Strategy (SRI) and other strategies aimed at broader inclusion goals.

Criteria for integration vs. segregation, discrimination

Projects must be assessed on whether they promote genuine integration or contribute to segregation. Independent oversight must be strengthened to prevent local and regional authorities from exploiting funding loopholes.

Funding applications should require evidence of anti-discrimination compliance, detailing how proposed projects further desegregation and community-based alternatives to institutional care. Managing authorities must be held accountable for ensuring that project implementation aligns with inclusion rather than segregation.

Regular audits and independent reviews

Roma-led organizations, disability rights groups, and other grassroots advocacy networks should actively participate in project audits to enhance transparency.

Closer collaboration between the European Commission and national authorities is essential to align EU fund monitoring with international human rights standards and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Conclusion

To address the entrenched challenges highlighted in this report, the following actions are crucial:

Comprehensive and independent oversight

Structured Audit System: Implement a rigorous auditing mechanism for EU funds, ensuring that evaluations align with anti-discrimination goals outlined in the National Roma Integration Strategy (SRI) and relevant European frameworks. **Blighted Lives: Romani Children in State Care** underlines how institutional biases can persist when oversight is weak, emphasizing the need for transparent reviews of fund utilization.

Transparent allocation of funds

Regulatory Strengthening: Municipal authorities and managing bodies should be required to demonstrate compliance with inclusion policies before funds are disbursed. Clear, binding criteria can prevent the misuse of resources for segregated schools or institutional care that perpetuate discrimination.

Empowering local communities

Critical Role of Grassroots Groups: Recognize the central contribution of Roma-led organizations, disability rights groups, and other grassroots networks in both monitoring and implementing EU-funded projects. Direct engagement with marginalized communities often reveals the actual impact of fund allocation, as opposed to idealized institutional reports.

Stronger Legislative Safeguards

Binding Commitments: At both national and EU levels, introduce legally enforceable measures that restrict funding for segregating or institutionalizing practices. Such safeguards are essential for ensuring that EU-funded initiatives advance deinstitutionalization and inclusion, rather than reinforcing systemic exclusion.

Sustainable Reform

The findings presented here call for urgent reform in how EU funds are allocated, monitored, and enforced in the Czech Republic. Blighted Lives: Romani Children in State Care demonstrates that without initiative-taking measures and community involvement, institutional and segregating practices can persist even when project documentation appears compliant.

Risk of Perpetuating Discrimination: In the absence of stronger legal frameworks, enhanced oversight, and robust community participation, EU funds may continue to reinforce rather than dismantle existing inequalities.

Decisive Action by Authorities: Managing authorities and policymakers must acknowledge the systemic issues detailed in this report and adopt concrete steps to rectify them.

Restructured Approach: A revamped monitoring system, coupled with transparent fund allocation and inclusive decision-making, is necessary to guarantee that EU resources fulfill their intended purpose building a just and inclusive society.

The success of EU-funded programs should not be gauged by the volume of allocated resources alone, but by measurable improvements in the lives of marginalized communities.

Achieving sustainable social change requires an inclusive, transparent, and community-driven framework that actively counters cycles of exclusion and discrimination.

Moving forward, it is imperative that managing authorities and policymakers adopt the recommended reforms to align EU funding with its original mandate: promoting inclusion, equity, and desegregation. By doing so, the Czech Republic can make significant strides toward creating a fairer, more just society for all. The time for decisive action is now only through meaningful engagement, transparent governance, and unwavering commitment to human rights can these systemic issues be overcome.