

3 Balancing ESF goals with established national policy on special education: The case of the Czech Republic



ESF implementation in the Czech Republic happens in a context largely determined by how the Czech state defines the notions of vulnerable groups, special educational needs, and educational inclusion. The striking aspect is the fact that many Roma children in the Czech education system are

directed towards special educational programmes for children with ‘mild mental disabilities’. This chapter approaches the institutional and bureaucratic dimensions of ESF implementation in the Czech Republic having in mind this particular issue and its linkage to the overarching goals of the European Social Fund. After briefly describing the national context, the chapter describes ESF-funded programmes in the Czech Republic. Later on it analyses the institutional set-up of the largest ESF-funded programme focusing on the education of vulnerable groups, as well as the manner in which bureaucratic decisions shape the market for educational service delivery in the country.

The context: Roma children in the Czech education system

Within the Czech system of basic schools (providing students with compulsory education), there are special basic schools designed for pupils with various disabilities and there are special-needs classrooms in mainstream schools. The Education Act of 2004 enacted that special schools were renamed basic schools or practical basic schools, and they are currently supposed to provide their students with proper basic education and give equal educational opportunities. However, students in these schools may be educated according to the *Supplement to the Framework Education programme for Children with Mild Mental Disability*. This reduced curriculum places an emphasis upon practical activities (thirty-five lessons vs. nine lessons for students in mainstream schools) and reduces the content of other subjects (e.g. four foreign language lessons vs. 21 lessons in mainstream schools). In 2009/2010, 4.8 per cent of compulsory school students were educated in special schools or classrooms. Students are placed in special schools on the basis of an examination in a pedagogical-psychological guidance center, often attached to the practical school, and with parental consent. After finishing compulsory education, special school students can, in principle, apply to go to any upper secondary school. However, they most often go on to one- or two-year vocational schools where they finish their studies without a vocational certificate.

The place of Roma children in the Czech education system is largely defined by a legal definition (Act no. 561/2004, section 16), which stipulates that individuals with 'health impairments, health disadvantages or social disadvantages' should be classified as having special educational needs. This classification automatically directs these children towards special schools. Most of the children in this category, including Roma children, achieve insufficient education and graduate with low or even no qualifications, which is also one of the causes of social exclusion. No official statistics on the educational attainment of Roma children are available. Research shows that successful completion of upper secondary education is very rare for these children.

The annual report of the Czech School Inspectorate (CZ-CSI) for the academic year 2009/2010 describes many problems regarding

the mechanisms for the assignment of students to schools or classrooms (Czech School Inspectorate 2010) where they are educated according to the *Supplement to the Education programme for Students with Mild Mental Disability*. The report disclosed weaknesses in the diagnostic procedures and in receiving parental consent. CZ-CSI also states that students educated according to the programme for students with mild mental disability have very limited opportunities to return to mainstream education. Many Roma students were recommended to practical basic schools by counseling centers without a diagnosis of mental disability or any other disorder. CZ-CSI highlights that 35 per cent of Roma students are classified as mentally disabled, and describes this fact as discriminatory.

However, the system of special schools was challenged by a complaint of Roma citizens to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). According to a 2007 decision of the ECHR, the Czech Republic violated the right to education for eighteen Ostrava Roma that were wrongly subjected to special schools (ECHR 2007). The court ruled that socially disadvantaged Roma children without mental disabilities must no longer be placed into educational programmes for children with mild mental disabilities.

This was the first time the court had considered a nationwide pattern of discrimination. In this case, the court shifted its focus from the violations of the individual applicant's rights to systemic discrimination. A complaint was first filed on their behalf in the Czech Constitutional Court by attorneys from the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC) and local attorneys. The European Court of Human Rights, sitting as a Grand Chamber, unanimously dismissed the government's preliminary objection and held, by thirteen votes to four, that there had been a violation of Article 14 read in conjunction with Article 2 of Protocol No. 1. The decision in this case has had an impact on the Czech Republic. On November 15, two days after the rendering of the final judgment in the case, the European Commission called on the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic to take measures preventing future discrimination against Roma children in education (Devroye 2009).

In April 2009, a report from the Czech government on the measures related to the Judgment of the ECHR related to this case was submitted

to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. The Report was approved by a resolution of the government. The resolution included the requirement to submit to the government by January 31, 2010 a proposal for a National Action Plan of Inclusive Education (CZ-NAPIE 2010). This task was fulfilled and the proposal was accepted by the government in May 2010. CZ-NAPIE does not just deal with selective practices towards children with special educational needs, but influences the education of all children and aims at maximizing the chances of each and every individual learner by removing barriers to his/her best performance in its widest sense.

Due to a change of government and many organizational changes in the CZ-MEYS, the action plan was for several months in what could be called a standby mode. In January 2011, CZ-NAPIE activities started again. As the Czech Republic and the former Czechoslovakia have had an extensively developed system of special schools, it is difficult especially for practitioners to accept the idea of inclusive education. There are few institutional incentives that make inclusion possible, and widespread prejudice against the Roma continues to support the social construction of 'mild mental disability', which is in and of itself highly problematic. It is thus not clear whether CZ-NAPIE would be implemented in its full scope or whether it would be reduced to partial measures focused on specific groups of special-needs students (Straková et al. 2011). In this context, how the social and educational inclusion goals of the ESF are pursued is of utmost importance.

ESF-funded programmes in the Czech Republic

In the 2007–13 programming period, the Czech Republic managed, in the frame of the European Social Fund (ESF), a relatively large number of operational programmes. Three deal, to some degree, with vulnerable groups. Whereas the Operational Programme Human Resources and Employment is targeted on strengthening the integration of persons endangered by social exclusion, or who are socially excluded as a whole, the Operational Programme Education for Competitiveness (CZ-ECOP) focuses mainly

on education and pays much attention to the handling of the social exclusion of children and youth. The third relevant programme, Operational Programme Prague – Adaptability (CZ-OPPA), is more complex in character and targets both the above-mentioned aspects of social vulnerability in the region of the Czech capital.¹

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS, or MŠMT in Czech) was designated as the managing authority (MA) for the CZ-ECOP, as it is responsible for public administration in education, for developing educational, youth and sport policies, and international co-operation in these fields. The global objective of the CZ-ECOP is the development of an open, flexible and cohesive society, and the strengthening of the competitiveness of the Czech economy through partner co-operation, resulting in improved quality and modernization of the educational system in the complex framework of lifelong learning, and in improving conditions in the area of research and development. CZ-ECOP (MEYS 2007b) is composed of five priority axes: 1) Initial education (initial training, in some documents cited in this chapter); 2) Tertiary education, research and development; 3) Further education; 4) System Framework for lifelong learning; and 5) Technical assistance. CZ-ECOP falls under the multi-objective and thematic operational programmes financed by the European Social Fund, in particular under the Convergence objective (NSRF Czech Republic 2007–13). The global objective of the CZ-ECOP is particularly consistent with the first and basic priority of the strategic document *Europe 2020* (the ‘Youth on the move’ initiative which enhances the performance of education systems and facilitates the entry of young people to the labour market).

The managing authority of the CZ-OPPA is the Capital City of Prague. The global objective of CZ-OPPA is to raise Prague’s competitiveness by promoting the adaptability and efficiency of its human resources and by improving access to employment for all. Fulfilling this objective

1 In the frame of structural policy, EU regions are classified according to the GDP of the region. The region of Prague belongs under the Regional Competitiveness and Employment objective; the rest of the country under the Convergence objective. Therefore, Prague may not use EU funding intended for the rest of the Czech Republic, and vice versa.

contributes to strengthening the sustainable social economic development of the region and increasing the importance of the capital city in the central European region, as compared with the capitals of other member states.

This chapter will deal mostly with the CZ-ECOP and how it treats the issue of education for children with special needs. The support for pupils with special needs is relatively broad within the CZ-ECOP. There is a selection of measures that, in theory, should serve those pupils very well. All these measures are incorporated in priority axes 1 and 4. Priority axis 1 was initially implemented through three complementary areas of intervention (measures or areas of support).

The support for children and pupils with special educational needs is most significantly incorporated in *Priority Axis 1 Initial Education* and specifically in the key area of intervention *1.2 Equal opportunities for children and pupils*, including the children and pupils with special educational needs. The supported projects focus on helping pupils with special educational needs to overcome their problems, and on enabling their involvement in the educational process. The vulnerable target groups are mostly defined by physical or social-cultural criteria. One defined group of potential beneficiaries comprises children with special educational needs from nursery schools and preparatory classes for admission to primary schools. In reality, this target group is formed to a large degree of Roma children. Two other key areas of intervention focus on quality improvement in education and the improvement of the skills of teaching and non-teaching staff in all schools, without a special focus on educational inclusion.

Within the CZ-ECOP, two other key areas of intervention were designated. KAI 1.4 is intended for basic schools (ISCED 1 and 2) and KAI 1.5 for secondary schools and conservatories (ISCED 3). Both KAIs are constructed on unit costs – or a system of templates. Each group of templates is focused on one specific area (for example mathematics, literacy or sciences). One group of these templates deals also with inclusion topics and, for example, enables schools to hire special education teachers, teaching assistants or school psychologists. These KAIs have only one type of potential applicant. Every registered school in the Czech Republic (excluding those in Prague) has a fixed, allocated amount of money, based on the number of pupils who could apply. Therefore, these two KAIs actually

do not involve real competition. The implementation of templates for primary schools started in 2010, whereas the launching of KAI 1.5 was enabled later by reallocations from one priority axis to another (approved by the monitoring committee of the CZ-ECOP in June 2011), since there were not enough funds in priority axis 1 at that time.

The biggest implementation problem of the CZ-ECOP became the repetitive organizational and personal changes, not limited to the leadership of the Ministry of Education,² but also including the group that is responsible for managing assistance from EU structural funds. As a result, there were delays in the implementation of the programme structure, and in resolving legal relations between the Managing Authority, Intermediate Bodies in thirteen regions of the country, and other stakeholders.

An important risk is connected to these changes. According to evaluation reports, there is a lack of co-operation, co-ordination and division of responsibilities between the CZ-MEYS departments responsible for non-fund agenda and CZ-MEYS departments belonging to the implementation structure, the managing authority and, above all, the departments responsible for implementing individual national projects. The co-ordination and co-operation between entities is insufficient. Due to these issues, the programme is included among the most problematic structural funds programmes implemented in the Czech Republic. The 2010 report of the European Court of Auditors exhibited one of the highest error rates of submitted projects within the Member States. This fact led to the suspension of payments for the CZ-ECOP in January 2012. After the approval of the list of measures to be undertaken by the Czech authorities, payments were resumed in December 2012.

The annual reports discussed the issue of the poor quality of individual assessments of applications. When externally evaluated, the assessment of applications provided by the individual evaluators did not match programme requirements. The evaluators had to rework their assessments

2 Since 1989, the Czech Republic has had 15 ministers of education, with their average time in office being ten months. A change of minister is often accompanied by changes of all top ministry officials.

or supplement them, and the third individual evaluator (supposed to be exceptional) often had to be utilized, because the results of the first two assessments of the same application were too different. Evaluators had to be retrained in problem areas and further co-operation continued only with those whose work results were of a high quality and in accordance with the established rules and requirements of the OP.

Another issue appeared in connection with the first calls for applications launched, as the definitions of compulsory monitoring indicators, which should have clearly described their meaning and fulfilment, were not available. For this reason, many applicants understood differently (and wrongly) what the individual indicators really meant. There were situations when, due to an inaccurate understanding of the problem, the indicators were incorrectly set by the applicants. There were also problems with the estimated values of indicators. This led, in later phases, to many requests for substantial changes in the set of indicators used. Many contractors had to apply for substantial changes to the indicators they had originally set out in project proposals. In 2011, a new guide for indicators was approved and the situation improved.

The administration of applications was, in the first years of CZ-ECOP implementation, greatly affected by the poor stability of the monitoring systems (Benefit and Monit, see MEYS 2008, 2009b, 2010, 2011, 2012).

Last but not least, the low administrative capacity of the MEYS and its departments led to the rejection of national (system) project proposals by the European Commission. The lack of a conceptualized approach may be another explanation for an unsatisfactory drawing of the finances.

Progress in CZ-ECOP implementation by 2012

The CZ-ECOP became operational on October 12, 2007 following final approval by the European Commission. During 2007, the Implementation Document for the CZ-ECOP was finalized (MEYS 2007c). Furthermore, in that year the complete detailed documentation for the Implementation

of the CZ-ECOP manual with annexes and guidelines was prepared. These documents describe in detail the rules and procedures which have to be observed and which actually influence the application and implementation processes tremendously. Also, in 2007, a call for the first global grant for regions in measure 1.2 was launched.

In 2008, significant progress was achieved, especially in launching the calls and in approving projects (MEYS 2009b). The CZ-ECOP published a total of fifty-seven calls, of which four were for global grants for regions. The regions subsequently published forty-two calls in total – for the PA 1 and for the measure 3.2 – for the submission of grant projects, which by the end of 2008 reached a total of 502 projects. The remaining eleven calls were published by the Managing Authority: for the presentation of other individual projects (five calls), individual national projects (four calls), and technical assistance projects (two calls). A total of forty-eight projects for technical assistance and six individual national projects were approved. In all, the OP processed 2,856 project applications and approved 556 grants, for a total of 112,218,460 EUR (not including global grants).

In 2009, projects for a total of 614,762,111 EUR were approved, which represents 29 per cent of the funds for the programme, out of which 178,278,075 EUR (8 per cent of the funds allocated) was paid to beneficiaries. In 2009, a total of fifty-seven calls were published. Regions announced and administrated fifty-two calls for submission of grant projects. The remaining five calls were announced by the Managing Authority for the submission of further individual projects (MEYS 2010). Calls for national individual projects and technical assistance continued.

In 2010, 871,761,196 EUR for individual projects and global grants were contracted, which represents 41 per cent of the programme allocation (MEYS 2011). Contractors were reimbursed with 354,831,108 EUR (16 per cent of the allocation for the programme). In total, 3,370 projects were approved. A total of 65 calls were announced for IP and GP (580,776,435.5 EUR in total), of which seven were for individual projects (461,386,218.6 EUR) and fifty-eight calls for global projects (EUR 119,390,216.9).

In 2011, significant progress in the implementation of CZ-ECOP was achieved and a number of measures for further acceleration were adopted (MEYS 2012). The biggest success was KAI 1.4 (improving education at

basic schools), as discussed in a previous section. The call for applications was launched in the spring of 2010. By the end of 2011, 3,580 project applications were submitted, which counts for more than 90 per cent of all eligible applicants. The main objective (the participation of elementary schools in the absorption of ESF funds) was reached. In particular, small schools had until then only a limited possibility to raise the money using more traditional channels, as the administrative procedures were very complicated.

The institutional set-up of ESF in the Czech Republic

Before the CZ-ECOP launch, there were two main strategic documents defining the position of children and pupils with special educational needs in the Czech educational system. The first one is the National Education Development programme – White Paper (MEYS 2001) and the second one is the Czech Republic Long-term Development Plan for Education and the Educational System (MEYS 2002, 2005a). Their objectives and intentions are fulfilled primarily by the preparation of legal regulations, concepts and methodologies for changes resulting from strategic directions. The White Paper initialized the curriculum reform, and its implementation was one of the main objectives to be dealt with within the CZ-ECOP. The main objective of the reform was a qualitative change in educational practices and approach to pupils; it introduced the framework educational programmes for schools at levels ISCED 0 to ISCED 3. Each school in the system was supposed to prepare its own School Educational Programme, based on framework programme for the specific type of school.

During the implementation of the CZ-ECOP, the Czech government has further modified the Czech Republic Long-term Development Plan for Education and Educational System (MEYS 2007a, 2009a). The last version is intended for the period until 2015, which will affect the next programming period for ESF 2014–20.

One document specifically focused on children from socio-culturally disadvantaged environments and for children with low cultural and social

status (and for their families) is the Early Childcare Concept (MEYS 2005b). This concept covers, in particular, the period from the age of three years until the start of mandatory school attendance. One of the Concept's main objectives is to improve the conditions for educating these children within pre-school education, including the implementation of programmes that focus on the pilot screening of early care projects. Projects also supported the integration of pupils with disabilities into regular schools. According to the statement in the CZ-ECOP, the positive development has been observed primarily in special schools (schools established for pupils with special educational needs).

The last call for proposals for other individual projects within KAI 1.2 (not yet evaluated) took into consideration the new *Strategy for combating social exclusion for the period 2011–15* (Agency for Social Inclusion 2011). This strategy points out the necessity of strengthening existing instruments for inclusive education and reducing the number of children from socially excluded localities that are educated in practical schools outside the main stream of education. The strategy aims to promote pre-school education of these children as well.

Formal decision-making

The main principle when using the resources from the European Social Fund for achieving the CZ-ECOP objectives is a strict separation of implementation, payment and control (MEYS 2007c). The CZ-MEYS has authorized the Section for Managing the Structural Funds IV/I of MEYS to ensure the function of the CZ-ECOP Managing Authority by the decision from the Minister of Education, Youth and Sports on the implementation of structural funds within the ministry. The National Fund Department of the Ministry of Finance has been authorized to act as the Paying Authority and Certifying Authority of the Education for Competitiveness OP by a decision from the Minister of Finance. The Audit Authority is established in Article 59 of the Council Regulation (EC) no. 1083/2006. The Ministry of Finance has been authorized to act as the Audit Authority by Government Resolution no. 198/2006 of February 22, 2006. The Minister for Finance has decided to

entrust this function to the Audit Authority (Central Harmonization Unit Section), which is functionally independent of the CZ-ECOP Managing Authority and the Payment and Certifying authorities.

The Managing Authority (as mentioned above) is an integral part of CZ-MEYS. Therefore, all significant adjustments of ministry policy should be approved by the MA as well (MEYS 2007c). Due to the financial crisis and the reduction of the budget that the government allocates to education and related activities, the role of ESF support is immense. Therefore, the quality of implementation can really influence the educational reality in the Czech Republic. The role of the MA depends on personal situations within the management of MA. It is worth mentioning that, over the years, the situation has improved and recently, functional co-operation between different parts of CZ-MEYS was established and the preparation of new programming period is being realized across the ministry. Due to many administrative and personal changes in the Section for Managing the Structural Funds, the departments responsible for assessment and evaluation, as well as implementation of projects, had various difficulties with competencies as revealed in the external evaluation report *Annual review of progress of CZ-ECOP, 2010* (MEYS 2011b).

Calls for national individual projects, as well as for other individual projects, are prepared by the MA; calls for grant projects within the global grants are prepared by Intermediate Bodies, but are subject to prior approval by the MA. During the call preparation, other stakeholders and experts may be addressed. When the call is being prepared, round tables are organized where important stakeholders can send their representatives. Whether the broader discussion is organized or not partly depends on the current situation or atmosphere at the MEYS. However, regions are always included.

The representation of stakeholders

Relevant stakeholders are represented in the Monitoring Committee (MC), which monitors the fulfilment of the programme and its effectiveness and proper implementation. The MC also participates in evaluating and approving the drafts regarding the CZ-ECOP Implementation Document, implementing the programme, approving changes and reallocating the text

of calls in some cases. The MC is based on the partnership principle and its members are representatives of the MA, partner ministries, regions, social partners, non-governmental non-profit organizations, Paying Authority, and Certifying Authority. As almost half of the members are regions (thirteen members out of thirty), the greatest impact is felt in regions that are perceived as being influential members of the MC. NGOs have only two representatives in the MC; therefore, their influence is not very strong.

Promotion of partnership

Partnership is defined in implementation documents (MEYS 2007c) as the relation between two or more subjects that is based on joint responsibility and co-operation during preparation and implementation of the project. In the case of partnership without financial contribution, activities such as consultation, piloting of innovative materials, co-operation between schools, and professional guarantees are accepted, but there is no financial contribution provided to the partner for participation in the project implementation. In the case of grant projects and individual projects (submitted by the entities that are allowed to establish financial partnership by legal regulations), the participation of partners with financial contribution is possible, on the fulfilment of defined criteria (i.e. the expenditures that incur to the partners of the applicant, which participate in the creation and implementation of material activities of projects, and are part of recognizable costs of the project). For the purpose of defining the partners' share in project implementation, it is necessary to come to an agreement between the applicant and the partners.

Shaping the educational welfare market in the Czech Republic

This section of the chapter showcases how two very specific sets of bureaucratic decisions, concerning the types of grants to be awarded and programme targeting, shape the achievement of ESF social and educational

inclusion goals in a very difficult national context. The analysis is focused on the calls for applications launched under the key area of intervention 1.2 *Equal opportunities for children and pupils*, which includes support for children and pupils with special educational needs.

The decision to award certain types of grants is essential in terms of ensuring the weakest actors in the Czech education system have access to funding which could help them address equality and quality of education issues. The support in the frame of the CZ-ECOP programme is implemented through three types of projects: grant projects supported in the framework of global grants, other individual projects, and national projects (MEYS 2007b).

The global grants represent a decentralized system of support at regional level. The calls for applications for global grants are launched by the MA after negotiating with the regions and other stakeholders. These grants should refer to approved Long-term Development Plans for Education and Education Systems prepared for every single region,³ and thus react to specific situations and problems in the regions. As each region has its own representative in the Monitoring Committee (MC), there is an unclear definition of the competencies of the Intermediates Bodies (the Czech regions). Also, the MA conditions in the form of global grants have a complicated administration. This aspect of implementation was repeatedly questioned in evaluation reports. Each of the thirteen Czech regions has prepared, within priority axis 1.2, two global grants, from which so-called grant projects were supported. Grant projects are usually projects of a smaller extent and are always implemented within the territory of one region. These projects focus mainly on the implementation of services for target groups of individuals and organizations, on the basis of demand specified by the beneficiaries and resulting from the analysis of target-group needs.

- 3 Regions are responsible for education in their territories. Regional authorities develop long-term policy objectives for their specific region in compliance with the national strategic plan every four years.

Other individual projects are subject to calls for applications launched by the MA. Unlike the global grants, these other individual projects are administered at the central level. The basic condition for the projects is that they must be multi-regional. The only exception is when the applicant is the region itself and its project focuses on solving a specific problem in the area of that region. The projects should focus on the development of national policies and on curriculum modernization.

National individual projects are system projects with only two eligible applicants – the CZ-MEYS and the Czech School Inspectorate. These projects should have an impact on the whole education system. In this category, for example, we can include the implementation of standardized examinations in primary and secondary education, the development of standards for the teaching profession, and the implementation of national comparative surveys. Also, there have been several projects aiming to reduce educational inequalities, mainly through counselling services.⁴

Who are the potential contractors?

The spectrum of potential contractors is quite broad within the above-mentioned key area of intervention. All of the following are allowed to compete for funding: governmental agencies (those organization directed by CZ-MEYS); regions and other regional governments; schools and school facilities (public and non-state); universities (public and non-state); research institutions; NGOs delivering educational services; certified providers of professional training for teachers; trade unions; and private companies (if they have been providing educational services in the two years

- 4 For example: the development of school-counseling centers; the prevention of dropping out of education; the support for the secondary education of pupils from socio-culturally disadvantaged backgrounds; the validation of non-formal education and informal learning in the network of schools providing adult education; minority integration centers (development of guidance, education and support services for socially disadvantaged pupils); and inclusive education support centers.

before applying). Provided that churches run schools or school facilities (for non-formal education, for example), they are also eligible.

The most frequent contractors in key area of intervention 1.2 are NGOs, schools and educational institutions (i.e. legal entities carrying on the activities of schools, and educational institutions in the schools register), universities, and organizations engaged in the area of leisure-time activities for children and youth.

Partnership structures

Partnership is generally supported and regulated by a guide for project applicants from the CZ-ECOP. The scrutinized calls refer in this matter to the guide and do not include any more specific requirements or incentives for project partnership. Partnership structures in the case of the projects funded under key area of intervention 1.2 do appear; nevertheless this comprises a minority of projects. There are no special provisions supposed to stimulate the participation of public-sector institutions in partnership structures. However, under key area of intervention 1.1 (which is aimed at all pupils in ISCED 1–3 schools) we find several projects where a school has established a partnership with a public organization directly supervised by CZ-MEYS.

Who are the potential beneficiaries?

The main target group in the grant projects implemented within the framework of global grants and in other individual projects under KAI 1.2 are pupils with special educational needs. The supported projects focus on helping pupils with special educational needs to overcome their problems and to involve them in the educational process. The vulnerable target groups are mostly defined by physical or social-cultural criteria. The calls (with two exceptions, calls 14 and 43) do not explicitly target Roma pupils and students. However, references to social disadvantages indirectly raise demand for the involvement of this ethnic minority in projects.

The origin of problems connected to children and pupils of Roma ethnicity is understood as a consequence of the low social capital of families and an insufficiently supportive societal-cultural background. The indirect naming of this group as ‘socially disadvantaged’, ‘with different societal-cultural background’ or ‘living in a socially excluded locality’ in project proposals signals the belief that vulnerability in education does not apply to the whole minority group. There is, of course, the issue of ethnic identification, as during the census, more and more Roma declare themselves to be Czech.

One clearly defined group of potential beneficiaries comprises children with special educational needs from nursery schools and preparatory classes for admission to primary schools. In reality, this target group is composed of many Roma children. Last but not least, another target vulnerable group, supported by most of the calls, comprises gifted and talented pupils and students who are not noticeably supported by Czech education policy. It is also worth mentioning that the calls analysed in this report supported a large number of projects aiming to prevent racism and xenophobia, whose beneficiaries were pupils and students, regardless of any special educational needs.

The secondary target group in most projects are teachers and other persons working with the primary target group (e.g. often employees of NGOs).

Based on the analysis of the texts of calls, it is very difficult to assess which potential beneficiaries were eventually chosen. Most of the calls include a long list of potential recipients, and applicants are thus given a large scope for choice. The possibility to target projects on problem groups through their specific selection in the texts of the calls has therefore been rather unused by the managing authority of the CZ-ECOP.

Designing services

The most frequently implemented activities in grant projects and other individual projects under key area of intervention 1.2 focused, among others, on the application and improvement of organizational forms of tuition and teaching methods supporting equal access to education (including the

creation of individual school framework programmes, use of information and communication technology – ICT, and e-learning applications), special pedagogical and psychological services for pupils defined as having special educational needs, non-formal education, teacher training, and the timely provision of the minimum guaranteed care for socio-culturally disadvantaged children. With respect to supported activities, during implementation, a positive trend in their definition in calls can be observed. While some of the first calls include very general formulation of the activities supported, in the following ones gradual refinement and their detailed description can be found.

As regards projects implemented by schools, we identified projects dealing with pre-school children and the transition from nursery to basic schools, and projects based on work with individual pupils and their families (often containing mentoring or remedial education). In a second group we have projects focusing primarily on developing an ‘inclusive school’ (by education of teachers and other pedagogical workers, developing new methods and forms of teaching etc.). In the third group we have projects for special and practical schools (schools with reduced curriculum). In their projects, NGOs mostly covered the following activities: remedial education and mentoring, counselling for pupils and families, and street-work and leisure activities.

Adjustments made during the commissioning cycle

Several problematic areas were identified. First, the low volume of certified funds, and the potential risk of non-fulfilment of the $n+3 / n+2$ rule, is identified as the main risk factor in CZ-ECOP implementation. In this context, the managing authority adopted a series of measures designed to minimize automatic de-commitment (see MEYS 2008, 2009b, 2010, 2011a, 2012). The programme has been streamlining the process of absorbing funds. Measures relating to the optimization of monitoring systems and the professional training of staff were taken, and guidelines for applicants and beneficiaries were amended. The same happened to monitoring indicators and the administration of payments. Second, one area of concern is definitely the quality of monitoring system MONIT7+ and the low quality of services related to this system. The total time for processing the requests is two to six months

in average, which does not correspond to the needs of implementation. Spontaneous and unwanted changes in functionality are another drawback. Third, most employees of the managing authority are graduates without previous experience, which is another element of insufficient administrative capacity. The managing authority and the intermediate bodies struggled with this lack of expertise. However, over the years, the quality of training has improved. Fourth, during the administration of calls, large differences in the quality of the individual evaluators were found. Therefore, in 2009, the MA tightened the conditions for the selection of evaluators and extended the certification. Within each new call, specific training is provided. Furthermore, a new method for the assessment of applications was introduced.

When tracing developments and changes in the commissioning cycle over the analysed period, we can observe the efforts of the MA for improving the processes and refining the texts of the calls for applications, especially in the areas of assessment criteria and requirements for integrated approaches.

Assessment criteria valid for all calls from the operational programme are included in the guides for applicants, while specific criteria which relate directly to a specific call are included in its annexes. As some eligible activities are more desirable and more complicated in terms of implementation (the inclusion of children and pupils with special educational needs in mainstream education, including non-formal education, for example), the project that has such an activity as a main goal will gain extra points (for example, a maximum of seven points within the call 08). The second example of an application of specific criteria is from call 43, where projects that would be implemented directly in social-excluded localities (explicitly defined within the call) were rewarded with four points during the assessment of the application. Of the one hundred points on the applications' assessment scale, eighty-five fall to the criteria applicable to the entire operational programme and fifteen to specific criteria. This ratio did not change in the analysed period. Nevertheless, there have been changes in the set of assessment criteria in the guide for applicants and some more specific criteria were developed. For calls launched after 2011, the financial criteria were evaluated by more points (twenty-three points) than before (twenty points). Over time, there has been a fluctuation of points awarded for the experience of the applicant (between

two and eight points). If we evaluate the development of specific criteria, we can say that, over time, they were refined, they have become more detailed and through them, the MA placed additional requirements on applicants (e.g. call 43 contained a specific criterion – *Applicant implements project in schools in socially excluded localities or in their neighbourhood* – which was awarded four points and implicitly guided applicants to prepare a project for pupils and students from the Roma ethnic group).

In time, the requirement for an integrated approach appears more often and more binding. While in the first calls (no. 8, the first call for applications for global grants) this requirement is not mentioned at all, in calls 14 and 27 (the second and third call for global grants) it is explicitly recommended. Among the supported topics of call 14, we find ‘Integrated and comprehensive programmes of specific primary prevention’, while in call 43 it becomes compulsory. Projects must address issues systematically in accordance with strategic goals and objectives.

Also, very few changes between older and newer calls in terms of market-shaping can be identified. There have not been any major differences, not in the case of potential beneficiaries, nor of potential contractors. The only exception worth mentioning is the exclusion of trade unions, employers’ associations, professional associations, and private companies from the categories of potential contractors. While call 8 (CZ-ECOP) allowed these groups to apply for support, the following calls excluded these stakeholders from applying and implementing projects under KAI 1.2. As was already mentioned above, the definition of supported activities (but not necessarily the activities themselves) in scrutinized calls has become more detailed and robust over time.

Conclusion

Czech education policy is characterized by a lack of steering and continuity. This situation makes the efficient use of ESF funds in education very difficult. Experience shows that a large proportion of ESF money has been

spent on partial issues with limited usefulness. The most serious danger, however, lies in insufficiently premeditated national projects that were launched just because of ESF money (in the situation where there was not sufficient expertise available). This may result in products that will be harmful for the system long after the period of European Structural Funds. Good examples of such projects are teacher standards or standardized assessments.

The projects are designed and implemented in isolation from each other and, sometimes, national education policy and, thus, in many cases do not have the desired impact. This is true also for the big 'national projects' carried out directly by the Ministry of Education. The 'project nature' of ESF activities encourages the carrying out of isolated activities rather than implementing a premeditated and consistent education policy. It has proven to be difficult to continue with the activity once an ESF project is over. The national rules for the ESF framework preclude proper preparation and the diligent development of instruments and thorough discussion in the education community, because the development is hurried to meet the timelines of a project. It also makes it impossible to adjust processes according to deficiencies that are discovered, because ESF projects have to be planned in detail in advance and it is difficult to implement substantial changes during their realization. The implementation of ESF projects in the area of education has the same deficiencies as the implementation of projects in other areas of public policy (Potluka et al. 2010). The problems are not related to an incorrect recognition of important topics, but to the inability to plan and implement a consistent educational policy, either with the help of ESF money or without it.

Nevertheless, slight positive trends can be observed in the preparation of calls which, with better timing and more detailed requirements for the applicants, make references to other public policy documents and research findings, and ask contractors for complex and systematic solutions. Also, some of the initial problematic issues with administration of projects were resolved and improved. The positive influence was undoubtedly because of recommendations and criticism from the European Commission, but also to some extent because of the time experience gained with the implementation of processes.

References

- Agency for Social Inclusion. (2011). *Strategy for combating social exclusion for the period 2011–15*. Prague: Agency for Social Inclusion.
- City of Prague. (2007). *Operational Programme Prague – Adaptability*. Prague: City of Prague. [CZ-OPPA]
- Czech School Inspectorate (CSI). (2010). *Analýza dílčích evaluačních systémů v počátečním vzdělávání v České republice* [Analysis of Partial Evaluation Systems in Initial Education in the Czech Republic]. Prague: Czech School Inspectorate.
- Devroye J. (2009). ‘European Court of Human Rights, Grand Chamber, Case OF D. H. and others v. The Czech Republic (Application no. 57325/00)’, *North-western University Journal of International Human Rights*, 7 (1), Article 3.
- European Court of Human Rights. (2007). *D. H. and others v. The Czech Republic. Case no. 57325/00* <<http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng/pages/search.aspx?i=001-83256>>.
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS). (2001). *Národní programme rozvoje vzdělávání v České republice. Bílá kniha* [National programme for the Development of Education in the Czech Republic. White Paper]. Prague: MEYS.
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS). (2002). *Dlouhodobý záměr vzdělávání a rozvoje vzdělávací soustavy České republiky* [Long-term Policy Objectives of Education and Development of the Education System]. Prague: MEYS.
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS). (2005a). *Dlouhodobý záměr vzdělávání a rozvoje vzdělávací soustavy České republiky* [Long-term Policy Objectives of Education and Development of the Education System]. Prague: MEYS.
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS). (2005b). *Early Childcare Concept*. Prague: MEYS.
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS). (2007a). *Dlouhodobý záměr vzdělávání a rozvoje vzdělávací soustavy České republiky* [Long-term Policy Objectives of Education and Development of the Education System]. Prague: MEYS.
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS). (2007b). *Education for Competitiveness Operational Programme*. Prague: MEYS. [CZ-ECOP]
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS). (2007c). *Implementation Document for the ECOP* (updated up June 2013). Prague: MEYS.
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS). (2008). *Výroční zpráva Operačního Programu Vzdělávání Pro Konkurenceschopnost za rok 2007* [Annual implementation report for CZ-ECOP, 2007]. Prague: MEYS.

- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS). (2009a). *Dlouhodobý záměr vzdělávání a rozvoje vzdělávací soustavy České republiky* [Long-term Policy Objectives of Education and Development of the Education System]. Prague: MEYS.
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS). (2009b). Výroční zpráva Operačního Programu Vzdělávání Pro Konkurenceschopnost za rok 2008 [Annual implementation report for CZ-ECOP, 2008]. Prague: MEYS.
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS). (2010a). *National Action Plan for Inclusive Education*. Prague: MEYS. [CZ-NAPIE]
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS). (2010b). Výroční zpráva Operačního Programu Vzdělávání Pro Konkurenceschopnost za rok 2009 [Annual implementation report for CZ-ECOP, 2009]. Prague: MEYS.
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS). (2011a). Výroční zpráva Operačního Programu Vzdělávání Pro Konkurenceschopnost za rok 2010 [Annual implementation report for CZ-ECOP, 2010]. Prague: MEYS.
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS). (2011b). *Roční hodnocení pokroku OP VK 2010. Závěrečná zpráva* [Annual review of progress of CZ-ECOP, 2010]. Prague: MEYS.
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS). (2012). Výroční zpráva Operačního Programu Vzdělávání Pro Konkurenceschopnost za rok 2011 [Annual implementation report for CZ-ECOP, 2011]. Prague: MEYS.
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS). (N.d.). *Organisation of the educational system in the Czech Republic 2008/2009* EAC EA Eurydice. <http://www.msmt.cz/uploads/adult_education/CZ_EN.pdf>.
- Ministry for Regional Development. (2007). *National Strategic Reference Framework of the Czech Republic 2017–13*. Prague: Ministry for Regional Development. [CZ-NSRF]
- Potluka, O. et al. 2010. *Impact of the EU Cohesion Policy in Central Europe*. Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag.
- Research Institute on Education. (2007). *The Framework Education programme for Basic Education*. Prague: Research Institute on Education.
- Straková, J., Simonová, J., and Polechová, P. (2011). *Overcoming School Failure. Background Report for the Czech Republic*. Prague: Institute for Information on Education.

