**Study Group on Disability Rights**

**REPORT**

**COUNTRY VISIT – CZECH REPUBLIC**

**Social services for persons with disabilities**

**3-5 April 2019**

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**SOC secretariat: Valeria Atzori**

**Wednesday 3 April**

The delegation left early in the morning for Prostějov but was delayed because the minivan turned out not to be accessible to wheelchair users, despite this being clearly specified in the call for tenders. A taxi company providing accessible cars was contacted and subsequently two members and the secretariat left in the minivan. However, the taxi did not arrive until 10.30 a.m. and, considering the distance (3 hours' drive), the member in the wheelchair decided not to join the rest of the delegation for that day. Over the following days, the transport company provided either an accessible minivan or a standard minivan and an accessible taxi. However, this accident showed the reality of the difficulties a person with limited mobility can face when travelling. Accessibility is still far from having been achieved.

**Meeting with Renata Cekalova, president of** [**Association Lipka**](http://www.oslipka.cz/) **and member of the Czech National Council of Persons with Disabilities**

During the stay in Prostějov, the EESC delegation visited three different centres:

* a day care centre for the elderly and persons with disabilities;
* a centre with sheltered housing for persons with disabilities, pastry production facilities and a café;
* the SENZA cooperative, which offers workshops and a restaurant as well as catering, cleaning and ironing services.

LIPKA is an independent non-governmental, non-profit humanitarian organisation founded in 1992 by the parents of children with disabilities. It started as a private school and day care centre and now offers rehabilitation and speech therapy. Currently, they have 82 clients, of which 42 are adults and 40 are children. The children at the school, all of whom have disabilities, attend classes from nursery to high-school level. The organisation receives a contribution from the national budget for each child, the rest being covered by parents' fees. The day care centre offers workshops on making pottery, ceramics, baking and other traditional products. One hour rehabilitation sessions are available twice a week for adults and three times a week for children, and include hydrotherapy. Digital rehabilitation is not available and IT equipment is scarce.

The sheltered houses offer accommodation to 42 clients, half of whom work or attend school in the morning. In the afternoon, therapeutic activities are available. For clients with more severe disabilities, meals are provided by the SENZA cooperative in the common kitchen and living room. At the weekend, clients go shopping and cook together. The aim of the activities offered is to teach clients to live independently (cooking, cleaning, etc.). Clients with less severe disabilities have their own apartment and are fully independent.

The SENZA cooperative currently employs 60 workers, 95% of whom are disabled. It has a pastry workshop and a tearoom, which are open to the local community. It also has a canteen, a laundry centre and sheltered housing. The employees prepare around 300 meals a day, of which two-thirds are to take away, especially for older people. Other activities include quality control and setting up workshops.

Both the sheltered housing and the SENZA cooperative have also received EU funding. However, this was not sufficient and a loan had to be sought from a private bank.

**Guided tour of the city hall and meeting with the deputy mayor of Prostějov**

The services available to persons with disabilities were presented:

* the entire public transport system is accessible;
* map of the "barrier-free" city - a first in the Czech Republic;
* an overview of existing social services in the community drawn up to evaluate and identify future needs. This has enhanced dialogue and cooperation among social service providers, families and local authorities.

**Thursday 4 April**

**International conference on "Disabled people on the labour market: when, how and why**", organised under the patronage of Radka Maxová, chair of the Committee on Social Policy of the Chamber of Deputies at the Czech Parliament.

The aim of the conference was to examine the situation of persons with disabilities in the Czech labour market, focusing on the perspective of employers. The programme included representatives from the Czech government and several employers' organisations, and highlighted some good practices from other EU countries. Gunta Anča also gave a presentation highlighting the EU perspective.

Main conclusions:

Recent changes in legislation entail an increase in the minimum wage, including for persons with disabilities. This is a problem for employers as the performance of persons with disabilities is sometimes not as high as that of other employees. Possible solutions put forward included a proposal for the government to introduce a corresponding increase in the payments it makes to employers.

Accessibility of the workplace and reasonable accommodation are a prerequisite and should become a reality.

The education system should also be inclusive and allow persons with disabilities to gain better qualifications that are useful on the job market.

Attention should be paid to workers that become disabled after an accident, and appropriate measures should be introduced. These should cover healthcare, rehabilitation and help with returning to work.

There is a need for a personalised approach and for coordination among employers, local communities and families.

**Friday 5 April**

Visit to a number of charities:

**Centrum pro tělesně postižené Fatima,**

The Fatima Centre offers rehabilitation services to adult patients with spinal injuries who have become confined to a wheelchair due to an accident or illness. A patient's stay may last for anything between 5 days and 2 years.

Patients are provided with temporary accommodation in the form of sheltered apartments. They also receive support in developing and sustaining the highest level of autonomy as well as the skills they need to return to their normal daily routines.

<https://praha.charita.cz/en/social-services/fatima-center-for-physically-handicapped/>

**Azylovy dům Gloria**

This centre offers accommodation and care to patients suffering from Alzheimer's disease. It also has a day care centre and sheltered housing for mothers with children. The centre aims to offer personalised care and a family dimension. Fees are paid by pensions and, if this is not enough, families, the social security system or the local city council also contribute.

**Domov svate rodiny- osoby s mentalnim postižením**

The centre offers accommodation and care to 72 people, most of whom were brought there as children and are now aged around 50 years old. Some workshops are provided, such as pottery workshops, and those who wish to do so can also help in the kitchen or as cleaners. However, as most of the residents do not have legal capacity, they cannot work outside, nor can they participate in elections. Some events are held annually to boost links with the local community. Such events include garden parties and other activities involving volunteers. Some patients cannot leave the building, having been individually assessed and deemed as being potentially dangerous.

**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

* National policy concerning persons with disabilities does not always protect the needs of persons with disabilities. Recent changes to the legislation provide for salary reductions in the case of "insufficient performance", affecting workers with severe disabilities. To compensate for this, workers with less severe disabilities have to work more, leading to unfairness in the system.
* The EU funding system requires organisations to be able to cover their expenses until funds are received. This procedure is cumbersome and small organisations risk being penalised.
* National governments should have a stronger voice and a multiannual funding system should be put in place instead of an annual system, in order to guarantee the continuity of projects.
* Persons with disabilities are often unwilling to actively look for a job because of fear of losing social benefits, having a low income, or losing their job and not being able to regain benefits.
* The following measures have proved beneficial in avoiding this: easy procedures for regaining benefits, training possibilities during employment and good salaries.
* More help and assistance should be given with finding employment. Benefits should come as a second step.
* Employment is a tool for inclusion in society. An open labour market is the best solution, followed by a supported labour market when that is not possible.
* It is necessary to tackle stereotypes among employers and in society as a whole regarding persons with disabilities.
* It is necessary to cut red tape for employers that wish to employ persons with disabilities.
* A quota system can help but there is a danger that only those with a lesser degree of disability will be employed. It is more important to change mentalities.
* Institutionalisation is still a reality in the Czech Republic. People who are deprived of legal capacity are also deprived of their right to vote. Supported decision-making should be introduced and community-based services should be developed so that big institutions can be permanently closed.