



Peer Review on “Housing exclusion: the role of legislation?”

Host Country Discussion Paper – Czech Republic

**National Circumstances, Local Solutions:
Providing Social Housing without Legislation in
the Czech Republic**

Prague (Czech Republic), 8-9 October 2020

DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

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Table of Contents

Executive summary	1
1 Housing exclusion in the Czech Republic and legislative responses so far	2
1.1 Current legislation on housing affordability	3
1.2 The Social Housing Concept of the Czech Republic 2015 – 2025.....	4
1.3 The Social Housing Act.....	6
2 From a policy pilot to a set of solutions: the Social Housing Support Project	8
2.1 Key activities and goals.....	8
2.2 Results so far.....	8
2.2.1 Testing social housing principles at local level	8
2.2.2 Analyses	9
2.2.3 Methodical materials	10
2.2.4 Events for social housing professionals	10
2.2.5 PR and general public	10
2.3 Difficulties and constraints.....	10
2.4 Lessons learned – inspiration for systemic change	11
3 Despite the successes, the future remains uncertain	13
4 List of references	14
Annexes	16

Executive summary

This paper offers a brief overview of the roots of housing exclusion of some vulnerable groups in the Czech Republic and the efforts in achieving a systemic change with legislative and non-legislative measures.

While the pursuit of establishing a national social housing framework has been unsuccessful so far, there are individual cases of addressing housing exclusion at the local level. Even with considerable differences between them, some Czech municipalities have successfully adapted the social housing principles defined by the non-binding *Social Housing Concept of the Czech Republic 2015-2025*. Thanks to the information and methodical support from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and financial support from the European Social Fund, those pro-active municipalities are able to share their experience with each other, as well as with other stakeholders. Research proves that a social housing scheme is beneficial not only for the people in need, but for the whole society. A public opinion survey shows a considerable level of support of a social housing legislation among the public.

Even with no social housing legislation in place, social housing can be successfully provided to vulnerable people at local level. However, without a comprehensive national framework, willing politicians, a stable financing system and enough adequate housing stock, the housing exclusion in the Czech Republic will continue to be an unresolved issue.

1 Housing exclusion in the Czech Republic and legislative responses so far

Since the 1990s, there have been voices in Czech society that called for the establishment of a comprehensive system that would address the need for adequate housing for those individuals who are unable to afford it on the free housing market. It is important to note that the Czech Republic has undergone a massive economic transformation that had a considerable impact on the housing market, besides other areas. Lux and Sunega (2006) cite, among others, these factors as some of the reasons for "the rising of housing costs and the in/equality of their distribution":

- the end of complex state-financed housing construction,
- price liberalisation of building materials,
- wage liberalisation in the private sector,
- deregulation of energy prices, as well as prices of other services tied to housing,
- deregulation of rents,
- privatisation of public housing.

These trends caused growing prices of housing, both for sale and for rent, and bigger inequalities between Czech citizens when it comes to the affordability and overall quality of housing. For certain vulnerable groups, single parents, people with disabilities, senior citizens or people experiencing racial discrimination, housing becomes virtually unavailable. With rising housing prices, especially in bigger cities, the housing situation becomes more precarious even for households with two incomes. In recent years, a trend emerged of people receiving housing benefits being forced to pay disproportionately high rents for low-quality rooms or properties. This so-called "poverty business" leads to segregation, concentration and further stigmatisation of people who are unable to obtain standard housing due to their financial or social situation.

The problems with affordable housing also have a regional dimension. Czech towns and cities have a high level of independence when it comes to housing. Without a set of national rules of public housing provision, there are considerable differences between individual municipalities when it comes to providing public housing to people who cannot afford to pay free market rents. While some towns and cities dispose with municipal flats they can offer to the citizens in need, other municipalities have privatised virtually all their owned housing. A survey carried out by KPMG in 2016 found out that while the municipality of Brno has one municipal flat per every 13 inhabitants, Ústí nad Labem owns one municipal flat per every 167 inhabitants (KPMG, 2016)¹. The decreasing public housing stock is a continuing phenomenon – while in 1991 municipalities owned 13.4% of housing stock in 214 000 houses, in 2001 it was 4.8% (79 000 houses) and then 2.7% (48 000 houses) in 2011 (Ministry of Regional Development 2012). Even those municipalities that provide their inhabitants with housing often greatly vary when it comes to the conditions for tenants, which can result in the most vulnerable people falling through the system.

While the government has introduced legislative and non-legislative measures, as well as financial incentives, aimed at tackling the issue of unavailable housing to certain vulnerable groups, there is still no legislative act for a systematic approach ensuring affordable housing to citizens in need. However, there are pieces of legislation and other documents that aim, at least partially, to deal with the challenges Czech households face while trying to obtain housing. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs created the *Social Housing Concept of the Czech Republic 2015-2025* approved

¹ See the comparison of selected Czech regional capitals in Annexes

by the government, which is the only strategic document that addresses the topic of social housing at the national level.

1.1 Current legislation on housing affordability

The Municipalities Act

The *Municipalities Act* of 2000, specifically the paragraph 35, states that the municipality is responsible for „creating conditions for [...] fulfilling the needs of its citizens, in particular the need for housing, health and safety, transport and infrastructure, information, education, cultural development and protection of public order”². However, this paragraph is quite unspecific and also states that these needs are to be fulfilled “according to local customs.” Moreover, the municipal obligations regarding housing needs are not further specified anywhere else in the act. Therefore, while this formulation has been a root of many discussions when it comes to responsibilities towards the citizens at risk of homelessness, the *Municipalities Act* does not provide a solution to the problem of homelessness or housing exclusion.

The Act on State Social Support³

The *Act on State Social Support* of 1995 regulates the conditions of eligibility for multiple social benefits, one of them being the housing allowance. Property owners or tenants registered as permanently resident in that property are entitled to a housing allowance if 30% (in Prague 35%) of the family income is insufficient to cover housing costs and if 30% (in Prague 35%) of the family income is lower than the respective prescriptive housing costs set by law.

Prescriptive housing costs are set as the average housing costs based on the size of the municipality and the number of household members. They include rent and similar costs for residents of cooperative flats and flat owners, as well as the cost of services and energy. Prescriptive housing costs are calculated on the basis of reasonable sizes of flats for the number of people in a household.

The level of housing allowance is set as the difference between prescriptive housing costs and the relevant family income multiplied by a coefficient of 0.30 (in Prague 0.35). This benefit helps households with a certain level of income to be able to afford free market housing. Quite often, the beneficiaries are households with one income and older people, especially pensioners.

The Act on Assistance in Material Need⁴

The *Act on Assistance in Material Need* of 2011 lays out situations of inadequate means of subsistence or housing, and defines some emergencies. It aims to tackle certain circumstances that can only be resolved with immediate assistance. Under this Act, everyone who cannot address their particular material need is entitled to receive basic support, with a focus on preventing those type of situations. Social work is an integral part of the system of assistance in material need.

A *person in material need* is defined as a person or family who does not have enough income and their societal and housing situation prevents them from enjoying what the society accepts to be basic living standards⁵. At the same time, these people are unable to increase their income without external assistance.

The supplement for housing addresses cases where the income of the person or family, including the housing allowance from the system of state social support, is insufficient to cover justified housing costs.

² translation by the author

³ retrieved from <https://www.mpsv.cz/web/en/state-social-support>

⁴ retrieved from <https://www.mpsv.cz/web/en/assistance-in-material-need>

⁵ 'Basic living standards' is a term used by the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms for the purposes of 'the Act on assistance on material need', these cover shelter and subsistence

The benefit is provided to flat owners or tenants who are entitled to an allowance for living and a housing allowance. In exceptional cases, a supplement for housing can be provided to a person not eligible for a housing allowance or to a person using a form of housing other than rental.

The amount of the supplement for housing is determined in such a manner that, after having paid justified housing costs (i.e. rent, services related to housing and energy costs) the person or family is left with the living minimum⁶.

1.2 The Social Housing Concept of the Czech Republic 2015 – 2025

The *Social Housing Concept of the Czech Republic 2015 – 2025* was prepared with the aim to outline a new comprehensive national system of social housing. The concept was drafted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, which brought together a broad panel of experts from other ministries, non-governmental organisations, social service providers, landlord's associations, academic workers and other relevant actors. While the document, which was approved by the government in 2015, presents a set of goals to be fulfilled by specific ministries and other actors, it is not legally binding. However, it is the only current governmental document that defines social housing, its core principles and target group. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has a responsibility to prepare a report about the fulfilment of the concept and present it to the Government at a yearly basis. A re-draft of the *Social Housing Concept* is currently under way in order for the social housing framework to better respond to the current housing and social situation in the Czech Republic.

According to the *Social Housing Concept*, social housing is provided to people who are in danger of or already facing a housing crisis. This includes low-income households that spend a disproportionate amount of their income on rent. Social housing at local level always takes the form of a flat tenancy and can be connected to social services, such as emergency houses or shelters. Social housing means getting standard housing units located outside socially excluded areas⁷ (if possible). Social housing allocation is based on needs assessment carried out by the municipality. The criteria considered in the needs assessment and its form is set by the individual municipalities⁸. Part of the assessment should be carried out by a social worker who is familiar with the applicant's situation. The needs assessment should also determine whether the social housing tenant should receive additional support in form of social work. The extent and intensity of social work support is determined individually, with respect to the particular social, economic and health situation of the members of the household. In cases when the beneficiary does not require (further) social support, social housing provided without the social work is sometimes referred to as affordable housing. The *Social Housing Concept* strongly recommends that social work is accessible to all social housing clients.

The local system of social housing may include elements of emergency housing, such as homeless shelters, which are effective tools of support in dealing with crisis situations. Furthermore, we talk about rental apartments allocated for social housing with special procedures that allow accelerating the processing of a rental contract or a

⁶ This is the necessary minimum required to take care of subsistence and basic needs (about €126 per month, increases with children in the household and other conditions). There is also the "existence minimum" which is considered the minimal income granted to people who are in debt (about €81/month)

⁷ A socially excluded area denotes, either explicitly or implicitly, a space (a house, street or neighbourhood) with a high concentration of people in whom we can identify the signs linked to social exclusion. The surrounding populations denote these places symbolically as negative ("bad address", "problematic locality," etc.). (Cada 2015)

⁸ While some municipalities use a point system to evaluate need, others prefer meeting the applicant with the council, possibly supplemented by a report from a social worker who may have done an on-site visit. Any of these, more, or a combination thereof.

leasing agreement⁹. Both of these are short-term forms of accommodation, usually provided for up to one year.

Social Housing Beneficiaries

According to the *Social Housing Concept*, the primary target group of social housing are homeless people, who are, as defined by the ETHOS typology (ETHOS, 2006):

- Roofless (without a shelter of any kind, sleeping rough)
- Houseless (with a place to sleep but temporary in institutions or shelters)
- Living in insecure housing (threatened with severe exclusion due to insecure tenancies, eviction, domestic violence)
- Living in inadequate housing (in caravans on illegal campsites, in unfit housing, in extreme overcrowding).

The target group of the social housing system as proposed by the *Social Housing Concept* also includes people who, despite receiving the social housing benefits, spend a significant amount of their income on housing (more than 40% of disposable income). Given the specificity of social housing, it is relevant to include in the definition of the target group also the amount of disposable income remaining to households after the cost of housing has been paid. According to the general guideline in the Czech Republic, 1.6 times the living minimum is recommended as the minimum threshold for a household. However, this limit can vary depending on local specifics and characteristics.

Apart from the material situation of a possible beneficiary, their social situation is also taken into account. While using the ETHOS typology mentioned above, the *Social Housing Concept* defines so-called vulnerable groups, i.e. those people that should be prioritised on a waiting list for social housing:

- Families with children at risk of being placed in foster or institutional care
- Families who will be able to get their child back from foster or institutional care after being housed
- Victims of domestic violence
- People leaving institutional care (i.e. childcare institutions and foster care, psychiatric hospitals, prison facilities, disability centres),
- Rough-sleepers and people living in commercial hostels and in social services
- People living in an environment that is harmful to their health
- People with disabilities
- Senior citizens
- Single parent families
- People facing discrimination on the housing market

Social Housing principles

Solidarity principle: As the basic principle of the state's social policy, social solidarity builds and reinforces social unity within the society. In the context of social housing, solidarity allows state intervention to be directed towards those in need.

Tenancy principle: the goal is to have everyone living in standard housing, not in emergency or temporary accommodation, as such conditions often further aggravate the social situation, both for those in need and the community as a whole.

⁹ When using privately owned homes for social housing purposes, a municipality can guarantee timely rent payment and cover potential damages to the flat as a motivation for private owners.

Necessity principle: social housing should be provided to people in social or housing need, therefore based on need, not directed by the so called "merit" (being debt-free, looking for work, children's school attendance etc.). There are also obligations and rules included in the tenancy contract which include: rent payment, diligent care for the housing unit, cooperation with the assigned social worker and progress toward removing incurred debts – should these or any other conditions be set in the contract. It is necessary to prioritise people with the most pressing need, preventing a worsening of their situation and enabling them to find solutions. The identification of people in need requires reliability and transparency, so it is recommended that municipalities establish tools and guidelines for needs assessment¹⁰.

Non-discrimination principle: the law prohibits direct and indirect on racial, ethnical, national, gender, age, sexual orientation, health, religion, or ideological grounds. Direct discrimination occurs when a person does not have access to social housing, or is provided with inappropriate social housing, based on one of the categories. Lower quality housing, or housing in a socially excluded area are considered less appropriate, as is housing in an area with limited or no access to work or adequate public services, especially schools. Direct discrimination also includes segregation – the spatial concentration of members of a given group (mostly ethnic) caused by the Government (e.g. the practice of housing Roma families in a particular area and non-Roma clients elsewhere). Indirect discrimination is the practice of awarding subsidies based on neutral and objective rules, which in actual practice leads to preferential treatment of a particular group.

Individual and differentiated approach principle: both the framework and the tools of social housing must be able to react to the varying needs of individuals. This should apply from the very first instance of housing insecurity (prevention), until the re-entry to the housing market. An effective and efficient system of social housing should include a wide spectrum of tools; from informational support and social work, to social housing itself. Services and aid should be offered on an individual basis so that families and individuals may use them per their personal needs.

1.3 The Social Housing Act

Based on the framework outlined by the *Social Housing Concept*, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has worked on new legislation concerning social housing. In 2017, the *Act on Social Housing and Housing Allowance* was approved by the Government. However, it was not approved by the Chamber of Deputies and after the 2017 parliamentary election, the new Government decided to start the preparations of the social housing legislation from the beginning, this time under the supervision of the Ministry of Regional Development.

On 7 February 2018, the Government approved the legislative work plan, listing the Ministry for Regional Development as the main coordinator of the outline and the draft law on social housing. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs was appointed a co-administrator of these works. In August 2018 it was decided that the works on the *Social Housing Act* will not continue for the time being and that the Ministry of Regional Development will prepare a Government Regulation providing the municipalities in the Czech Republic a grant support in purchasing and re-constructing the social housing stock of the country. The subsidy title, however, deals only with investments in the housing stock and does not apply the essential social work support. Moreover, some of the eligibility criteria for the grants are not attractive for municipalities (the renovation of an inhabited building or turning non-residential properties into housing is not covered by the subsidy title) and the scheme was therefore not met with enthusiastic response.

¹⁰ The eligibility criteria for application to the social housing system and the guidelines of the needs assessment are discussed in the methodical material 'Social Work in Social Housing' (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2019). The material includes examples of good and bad practice.

Professional social work and social services along with stable and transparent system of housing benefits, are essential parts of efficient social housing, especially for people in housing need who are dealing with multiple social and economic problems. It is important for the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs that social housing helps to solve problems related to the social agenda. That means that it should contribute to reducing the so-called *poverty business*, improve community living and prevent the overload of the social welfare system (benefits). Due to the worsening availability of adequate housing for an expanding group of citizens (not only those in need), the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs agreed with the Minister of Regional Development on a joint preparation of the *Affordable Housing Act*. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has submitted proposals for the new law to the Ministry of Regional Development and is ready to provide further assistance with the creation of the new legislation. However, it is apparent that there will be no new legislation approved before the end of the election period (October 2021).

Questions for discussions:

-
- *How can legislation establish effective social housing schemes?*
 - *How do Member States define social housing or affordable housing?*
 - *Who is the target group for social or affordable housing?*
-

2 From a policy pilot to a set of solutions: the Social Housing Support Project

After the *Social Housing Concept* was approved and during the works on the *Act on Social Housing and Housing Allowance*, the new system has been tested. In 2016, the 'Social Housing – Methodological and Informational Support in Social Agendas' (*Social Housing Support Project* for short) project has begun. In five years, the project managed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and co-financed by the EU, engages with key actors in social housing, both foreign and domestic, developing a Czech version of social housing.

2.1 Key activities and goals

The overall aim of the project is to introduce social housing in the Czech Republic, to evaluate the social housing principles defined in the *Social Housing Concept* at local level and to help creating an approach worthy of national adoption. Sixteen municipalities from across the Czech Republic have signed up for pilot projects and work closely with the ministry as part of the *Social Housing Support Project*. They were asked to create and introduce local social housing schemes which will serve as sources of good practice on national level. To ensure applicability of a social housing system in diverse conditions, the sixteen municipalities represent not only the various regions of the state, but range from a rather small settlement of 400 people, to entire districts of the capital, Prague.¹¹

In order to facilitate possible support, a Contact Centre for the project was established. The Contact Centre aims to gather and then disseminate useful information among municipalities. Its workers provide assistance to the sixteen cooperating towns and cities, as well as to any municipality interested in social housing, as well as to individuals in need. The Contact Centre also disseminates results to interested parties, the public interested in the topic of social housing and works on dispelling the many damaging myths that surround it.

As with any national reform, data and field experience should be complemented with a sufficient level of theoretical and scientific research to ensure its longevity and efficiency. This dimension is provided by an advisory body of experts on social housing, as well as studies commissioned by the *Social Housing Support Project*. By 2022, 13 papers will include both research studies (an evaluation study, a comparative analysis of social housing across Europe, residential segregation analysis etc.), as well as methodological handbooks for a variety of stakeholders on lessons learned and best practice. These handbooks are aimed towards social workers on the municipal level, the Czech Labour Office workers, and link social work and housing policies with other instruments of social policy.

In addition, educational seminars and workshops target social workers and Labour office workers, who deal with clients on a daily basis, therefore their acceptance and knowledge of social housing is of critical importance.

2.2 Results so far

As stated above, the main aim of the *Social Housing Support Project* was to pilot the implementation of social housing principles defined in the *Social Housing Concept*. However, since 2016, the scope of activities managed by the project has broadened, and the outcomes of the project have proven useful for a future, more systematic approach.

2.2.1 Testing social housing principles at local level

By the end of 2018, the towns and cities taking part in the project have supported 1966 individuals and committed themselves to provide 467 homes to their citizens

¹¹ For a map of municipalities taking part in the Social Housing Support project, see annexes

(Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2019). With the assistance of the Contact Centre workers and by sharing their experience, the municipalities have come up with their own local social housing concepts. While preparing these strategies, they were encouraged to involve local actors: municipal experts on housing and social work, social service providers, local non-governmental and non-profit organisations, delegates from local Labour Office, regional authority representatives and important housing stock owners. This practice of bringing all the actors to the table has proven extremely useful in devising viable strategies on combating homelessness and also forged stable and long-term working relations within the framework, where isolation of individual stakeholders has been a cause of ineffective policies in the past.

The municipalities also analysed necessary recourses and information needed to prepare quality social housing policies: they assessed the size and the technical state of local social housing stock, analysed the local demographic data and target group needs and made sure they have adequate capacities of social work for supporting the tenants in social housing.

Some of the municipal projects cooperating with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs even gained international recognition for their innovative approach to social housing provision. Brno municipality was awarded a *Sozial Marie Prize* for social innovation in 2017 for its rapid re-housing of families with children along the Housing First principles, and the evaluation by a randomised controlled trial¹². The municipality of Ostrava received a RegioStars award in 2018 for the renovation of 105 apartments for families who would otherwise live in sub-standard housing, with five set aside as emergency homes. It has also developed processes to access housing, a framework to cooperate with city districts, and social support for tenants. Tenants can more easily stabilise their lives and participate in society, while their low rent returns a profit to the city¹³.

2.2.2 Analyses

Studies and analyses aim to create an evidence base for future policy decisions regarding social and affordable housing. The study on the impact of inadequate housing on children found a link between inadequate housing and school performance of children. The main housing issues that have a considerable impact on a child's school performance, educational trajectory and future career options are: a) very small and overcrowded housing b) unstable housing (frequent moving) or c) housing with extreme financial constraints for the household (MEDIAN 2016).

A further analysis compares social housing systems in selected European countries (Máchová 2018) which was complemented by a more in-depth focus on the preventive anti-eviction system used in Vienna – FAWOS – and its possible transferability to the Czech Republic (Gřundělová 2018).

Important findings about cost-effectiveness of social housing were brought up by a comparative analysis of costs of homeless hostels (a type of social service where accommodation is accompanied by focused social work) and social housing (Zapletalová 2017). According to the study, the costs of a household in social housing with the support of a social worker are between 53% and 47% lower than the costs of the same household staying in a homeless hostel.

In 2019, a survey on neighbourhood relations was carried out (INESAN, 2019) which aimed to find out more about the public opinion on social housing and possible stigmatisation of this topic. The most important findings of the survey are that 85% of Czech residents are in favour of social housing legislation, while people who have personal experiences with the tenants of social housing are even more supportive of a legislative measure (over 92% is in favour of a new social housing act). Public opinion

¹² more at <https://www.sozialmarie.org/en/projects/7488>

¹³ more at https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/regio-stars-awards/2018

is that social housing is necessary (93% of respondents) and that there should be more social housing than today (79% of respondents).

2.2.3 Methodical materials

Methodical material for social work in social housing (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2019) is useful for municipalities taking part in the project and for any organisation or individual supporting social housing tenants. This material provides those professionals with a comprehensive overview of the main topics connected to the framework of social housing. In 2020, a follow-up methodical material will be published, specifically aiming at the experts at Labour Offices.

2.2.4 Events for social housing professionals

At the beginning of the project, an expert group with more than 60 members was established, representing stakeholders in the field of social and affordable housing. The expert group and its working groups meet several times a year in order to exchange opinions, share both good and bad practices and discuss any pressing matters – similarly to the aforementioned local groups established for formulating municipal social housing schemes (see below).

In the year 2019, a series of regional workshops was launched to further set the agenda of social housing even in the towns and cities that are not part of the project, but may be interested in social housing. These events bring together local experts on the topic from local, regional and national level to exchange their experiences and expectations when it comes to social housing. Again, the idea of mutual active cooperation is central to the workshops.

2.2.5 PR and general public

PR activities aimed both at experts and the public helped to advocate for social housing. With the help of a quarterly Social Housing Newsletter, a Facebook page and a website, anyone interested in finding out more about social housing has an easy access to information. The newsletter informs about upcoming events, new research and insight from individual municipal projects. The website provides methodical and analytical material, and its robust "frequently asked questions" section serves as a signpost for various kinds of stakeholders. The Facebook page is often used by individuals that face problems with housing (such as threat of eviction or domestic violence) as an easy and fast way of contacting a professional Contact Centre worker ready to help. Campaigns on the radio, newspapers and television have helped to inform the general public about the scope of social housing and various kinds of assistance provided for people in need, as well as disprove the misinformation and stereotypes about social housing that are still present in the Czech society.

Questions for discussions:

-
- *How do local actors, including local authorities, housing cooperatives, non-governmental organisations, experts by experience etc. implement social housing policies efficiently?*
 - *How to work across services (incl. social work, health etc.) to support and empower services users?*
 - *How to support services users during the transfer into "standard housing"?*
-

2.3 Difficulties and constraints

While many activities of the 'Social Housing' project have proved to be successful, there are still some issues that are not resolved, in particular specific questions about the future of the successfully established social housing systems. When it comes to

both the systemic project managed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the project of individual municipalities, efforts are questioned by project sustainability, political will (or lack thereof), the diminishing size of available social housing stock, as well as no new housing construction.

- **Sustainability of projects:** Many municipalities are keen to continue with the project, but funding such efforts after the European financing stops is far from resolved. Some municipalities chose to fund the activities at least partially from their own budgets, others have applied for other projects funded by the European Commission in order to be able to support the established local system.
- **Shortage of adequate housing:** No system of social or affordable housing, no matter how sophisticated, can work without sufficient supply of available housing at all. With steeply rising housing prices and considerable differences in housing management styles in different municipalities, it is challenging to provide accessible, non-segregated, non-stigmatising, and affordable housing. The interim incentives put in place by the Ministry of Regional Development have not proven effective in solving this issue so far, due to their high requirements and limitations making them unattractive for municipalities. Efforts at revising the rules are currently underway. Some municipalities and non-governmental organisations chose to use the European Structural Funds to obtain adequate housing, but this option is not accessible for all stakeholders, and it does not solve the question of sustainability of such new housing, or of the social housing scheme itself.
- **Lack of political will:** Even the internationally known projects can be stopped. For example, in Brno, where politicians who were vocal supporters of the *Social Housing Support Project* suffered a defeat in local elections and the new city representation decided not to continue with the project in the future. Without a robust national system in place, positive local change can be quickly undone by newly elected political representation.

2.4 Lessons learned – inspiration for systemic change

Even though the *Social Housing Support Project* focused mainly on the local level of policy-making, there are valuable lessons that can be beneficial for the policy change on national level as well:

- **Mutual communication is crucial:** Stakeholders often have different views, but the experience of the experts groups on local, regional and national level clearly shows that transparent and frequent communication with all stakeholders helps to create a less hostile and more effective environment for achieving long-term policy change. It is also important to communicate the policy goals clearly with the public, in order to avoid misconceptions and prejudice.
- **A clear set of rules and roles is needed:** Any policy framework requires clearly formulated rights and responsibilities of every actor involved. This step helps to prevent confusion, overlapping of roles and ineffective solutions resulting in individuals falling through the 'blind spots' of the system.
- **Good practice and data:** There is clear evidence, both from the Czech Republic and from abroad, showing that social housing benefits not only the people in need of adequate housing, but also their neighbours. There is data on positive outcomes, both in the fiscal and social sense, of providing vulnerable households with affordable housing. Furthermore, there is a possibility to learn from examples of countries, regions, towns and cities that as already set up a viable, robust social housing system.

- **The public is supportive of policy change:** There is evidence suggesting that the overwhelming majority of Czech public is in favour of having a social housing legislation in place. While public opinion may change in time, it is clear that right now, Czech citizens realise the devastating effects homelessness can have on an individual, a family and a community and they want their lawmakers to take action. One caveat to this seems to be, that the "not in my back yard" effect is considerable and whilst the public is supportive in general, many take umbrage to social housing projects in their local area.

Questions for discussions:

-
- *How to fund the effective implementation of housing policies, considering also EU funding?*
 - *How can public authorities at national and local level work together to implement legislative and non-legislative responses to social housing?*
 - *How to work with communities and tenants?*
-

3 Despite the successes, the future remains uncertain

When the *Social Housing Concept of the Czech Republic 2015 – 2025* was approved by the Government, it seemed logical that the social housing legislation will be put in place. However, five years later, in spite of the political proclamations and public support of a social housing act, there is no such legislative document. Even though there are pieces of legislation that partially touch upon the subject of overcoming inadequate housing and housing exclusion, the *Social Housing Concept* remains to be the only governmental measure defining that subject.

Thanks to European support and active local stakeholders, some municipalities have successfully implemented social housing schemes on a local level, showing their own good practices and producing a robust body of analytical data and methodical materials. Yet, even though there are undeniable success stories, local social housing schemes face a number of challenges, such as the shifting political will, diminishing public housing funds and a question of sustainability of the projects. Many, if not all, of these constraints could be addressed by a national social housing policy. Some of the lessons learned at the local level can be used for a broader policy change, such as defining a clear set of rules and roles, open and transparent communication at all levels of the framework and using existing data and information.

The Czech case demonstrates that even without legislation in place, local stakeholders can effectively address housing exclusion at the local level. However, without a systemic change and a national social housing policy in place, all the efforts and success factors will remain isolated and unstable islands of positive deviation.

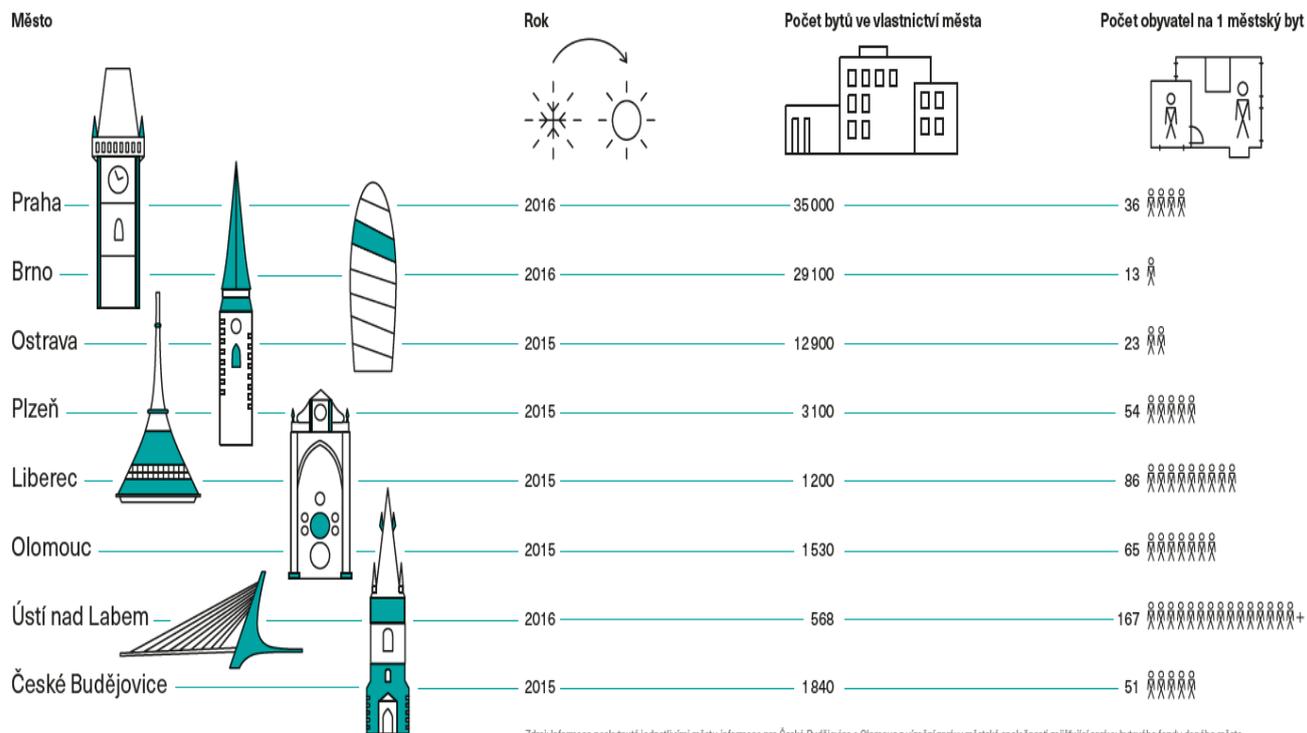
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Annexes

Annex 1 – Comparison of public housing stocks of selected Czech regional capitals (KPMG, 2016)



Annex 2: Map of municipalities taking part in the Social Housing Support Project (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2019)



