

UPR Pre-sessions 42 / Czech Republic: Statement

The Czech Committee for UNICEF is a non-governmental organization that promotes the objectives and principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a matter of public interest, monitors and defends children's interests and rights, and creates the conditions for them to be advanced.

It has been encouraging to observe positive developments in a number of areas related to child rights in the Czech Republic, including adoption of legislation putting an end to the placement of children under 3 years of age into institutional care, strengthening of the foster care system and specific plans to establish an independent ombudsperson for children, who would have the mandate to receive and investigate individual complaints with regard to violations of children's rights.

Our work is led by conviction that children have the right to be listened to and we do it by giving them voice in the youth polls that have been conducted on a representative sample of the Czech children population aged 9 – 17 since 2001.

This statement focuses on three areas which we have identified as a concern in the last edition of the poll that was carried out this year, thus providing a unique insight into how the situation, attitudes and life experiences of children in the Czech Republic have been affected by the COVID pandemic, the Ukraine refugee crisis as well as the current cost of living crisis.

Firstly, the efforts in dissemination of information and raising the awareness on child rights do not seem to be adequate and effective. Currently, approximately one in five children does not know any of their rights and this ratio has not improved since 2008.

Young Voices provide evidence that the children's mental health and life experience are closely linked to the socio-economic status of the family.

Certain segments of children's population are more likely to fall into poverty in the Czech Republic: for example 1 in 3 children in sole-parent households live in poverty compared to 1 in 13 children living with two parents. This relative difference is bigger than almost anywhere else in Europe. The Czech Republic has been encouraged by Committee on the Rights of the Child to Review the amounts of child allowances and ensure that children benefit directly from them which we consider a high priority, given the risks posed by the combination of current external factors.

The last concern is related to the children's mental health. In the Czech Republic, suicide is the second leading cause of mortality among those 15 to 24 years of age and there are not sufficient services available to children and adolescents in all regions of the country.

Based on the identified gaps in advancing child rights in the Czech Republic, the following recommendations are made:

- Strengthen efforts to increase awareness about child rights among children, as well as all professionals working with and for children, and introduce mechanisms for systematic monitoring of progress in this regard.

- Take effective measures to tackle child poverty and support vulnerable families, including with measures specifically targeting single-parent households.

- Establish a regional network of children's mental health teams as a systematic tool to support children, increase mental health literacy among teachers and children, and prevent mental disorders.