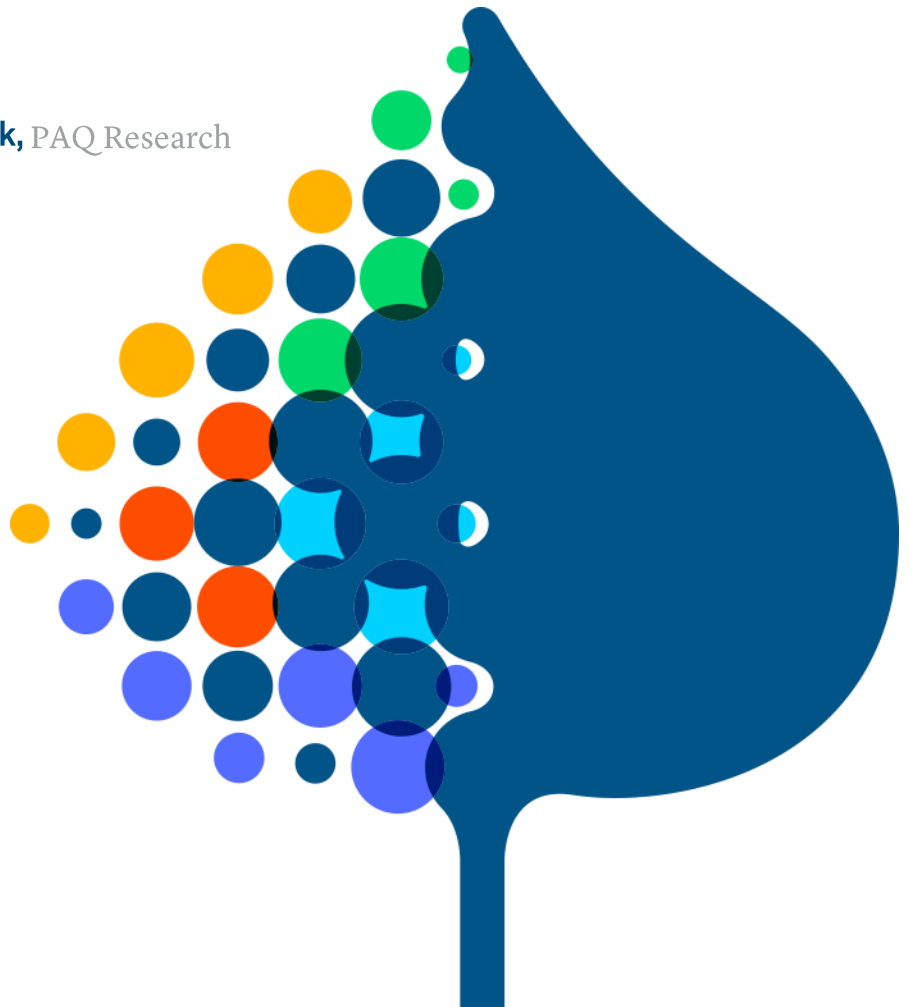




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Expert Report

Educational Challenges Need to be Addressed within a Single Team Comprised of the Statutory Authorities, School Principals and Other Services

Jan Zeman, Karel Gargulák, PAQ Research



The Czech system of education is lacking a clearly defined responsibility for a number of key areas. There is no mandatory preschool attendance for children from the age of three and no one has to help principals ensure that students achieve good results. Quality care for disadvantaged children and excellent results stem from voluntary cooperation between stakeholders, this is what helps the children succeed.

Introduction

The study provides insights into two realms of educational success. The first one is support for disadvantaged children by helping solve housing and foreclosure problems which are closely related to absenteeism, grade repetition and failure to complete mandatory school attendance. Regions that actively address this situation have surprisingly good kindergarten attendance rates or high numbers of supporting positions in schools. We describe this using the example of Kadaň, a municipality with extended powers (MEP) where 25.8% of parents are in debt distress.






Above-average educational outcomes are the second area. This is an insight under the surface of the functioning of schools. The case of Luhačovice MEP constitutes a universal guide to improving the quality of education. Principals there have been establishing a safe environment for reflection on teaching and introduction of new teaching methods. The statutory authority supports all this by reducing the administrative burden, thereby making principals more than mere building managers.

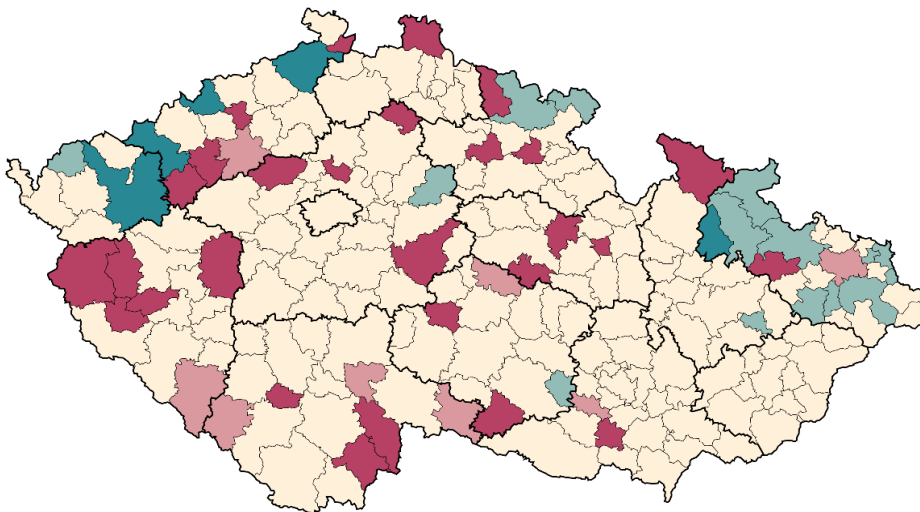
Available Data Display: You Cannot Compare Most with Říčany

PAQ Research's work is based on an effort to compare MEPs which have a similar social structure. This includes, for example, similar levels of debt distress, a housing crisis, socially excluded localities or unemployment. This is because it makes no sense to compare, for example, educational outcomes and conditions in Říčany with those in Most, where 4.6% of parents in the former MEP are in debt distress as compared to 26.5% in the latter.

Comparing MEPs with a similar social structure will enable us to identify micro-regions that are significantly more successful at improving a (lack of) educational success or teaching outcomes. The map shows which MEPs manifest lower or higher educational failure rates than would be expected. For the sake of simplification, it is a calculation of the number of children who should be repeating grades, fail to attend and drop out from elementary school (ES) where the area has a high/low proportion of parents in debt distress, housing crisis or socially excluded localities (SEA) and a high/low unemployment rate or parental education level. The methodology is described in more detail on the [map](#):

Failure rates due to social conditions (expert bands, 2023) by MPEs

-  Significantly lower failure rate than expected
-  Slightly lower failure rate than expected
-  Matching failure rate
-  Slightly higher failure results than expected
-  Significantly higher failure rate than expected

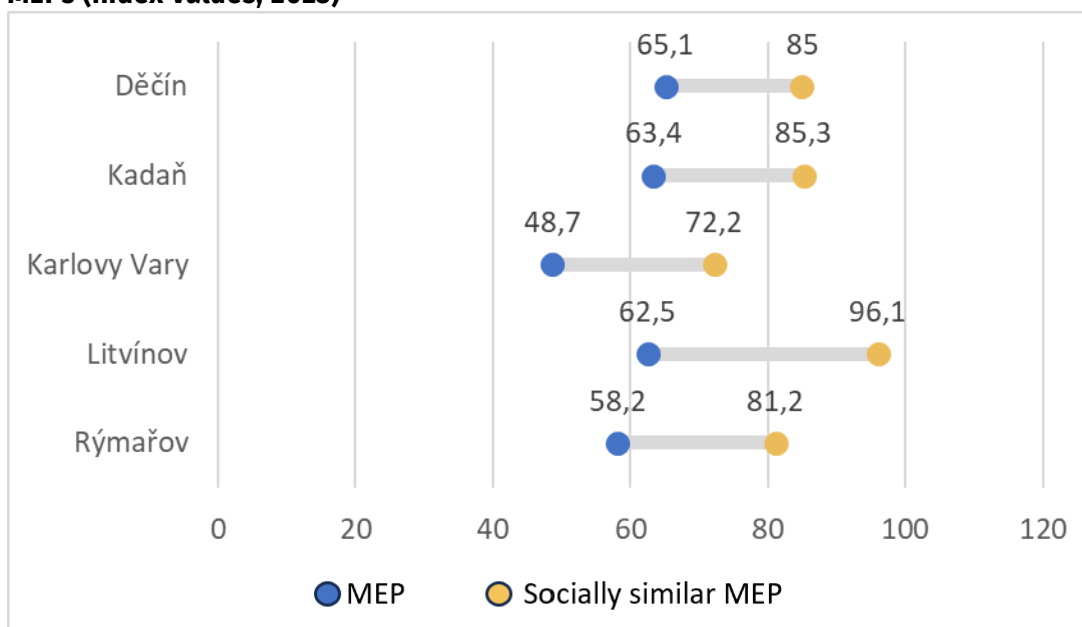


[Link to figure](#): this figure can be downloaded in high definition.
Source: DataPAQ

Overcoming the Social Situation in Practice

The graph provided below shows the difference between the educational failure of selected areas of MEPs and socially comparable MEPs. The failure index can be reduced by means of numerous interventions – from collaboration between schools and NGOs, through measures designed to ensure kindergarten attendance (Kadaň), to the allocation of support measures to economically disadvantaged children (Litvínov). These approaches are then reflected in the data. While based on social similarity, the number of students repeating grades in Kadaň and Litvínov ought to be the same as the number of students repeating grades in Sokolov (3,5%) or Teplice (2,8%) and the number actually repeating in Kadaň and Litvínov is lower by nearly a half.

Graph 1: Comparison of educational failure in successful MEPs and socially similar MEPs (index values, 2023)



Source: DataPAQ

Educational Outcomes Are Concentrated Not Only in Good Schools, but Also in the Seats of the Regions

The search for MEPs with a high concentration of high-quality schools continues to be a major challenge for quantitative data. In the Czech Republic, we can only rely on inspections or measurement of students' performance through testing conducted by the Czech School Inspectorate (CSI), the Uniform Entrance Examination (UEE) or selected testing (TIMMS, PIRLS, PISA and other).

Neither of these indicators is sufficiently reliable on its own (or representative for a smaller area) because inspection cycles may be overly long and it is difficult to obtain in-depth knowledge of the work of a school during a one-day visit. In addition, the

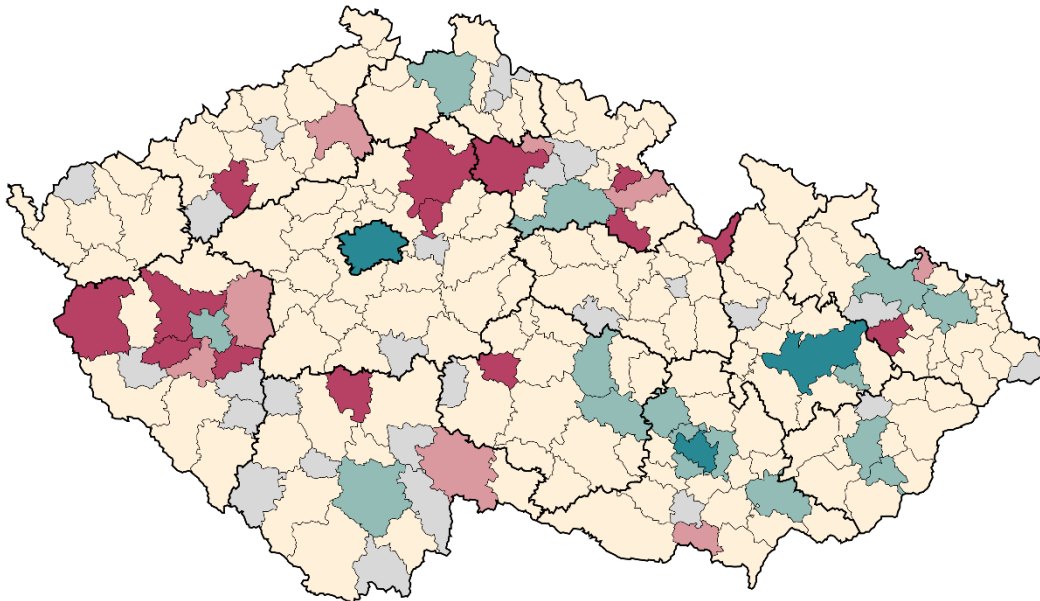
indicators mentioned still relate most strongly to poverty and other social conditions. Educational outcomes are also not sufficiently tied, for example, to unqualified teaching.

The map of the index of *educational outcomes vis-à-vis social conditions* (CSI test results in the fifth and ninth grades and the results of the uniform entrance exam) confirm that high-achieving students are concentrated in regional seats where there is a high socio-economic status (SES), good access to services and educated and motivated parents who develop their children and are concerned about the quality of schools.

Nine of the total of twenty-two MEPs (41%) whose educational outcomes are better than those of comparable MEPs, are administrative districts of regional seats. This means that only a few micro-regions are able to effect full-scale shifts of student outcomes in areas without a high concentration, in particular the concentration of economic and social capital. Even here, however, these are economically relatively successful cities with fewer social problems.¹

Test results with respect to social conditions (expert bands, 2023) by MEPs

- Significantly higher results than expected
- Slightly higher results than expected
- Matching results
- Slightly lower results than expected
- Significantly lower results than expected
- Missing data



[Link to figure](#): this figure can be downloaded in high definition.

Source: DataPAQ

¹ Such MEPs include: Rožnov pod Radhoštěm, Tišnov, Boskovice, Luhačovice, Polička, Šlapanice, Velké Meziříčí, Zlín, Žďár nad Sázavou.

Specific Indicators of Overcoming MEP's Social Situation in Education

Educational success in poor regions can be increased first and foremost by working with children from families with a low SES (cooperation between statutory authorities, schools, social services, housing support, etc.). In financially stable regions, overcoming an already average situation is more difficult to describe, but it mostly relates to the quality of pedagogical work. In both cases, it also depends on the management of education in the area with the statutory authorities' participation.

Overcoming a Social Situation by Preventing Educational Failure

The index of *educational problems in relation to social conditions* is derived from the *educational failure* index (absenteeism, grade repetition, premature elementary school leaving) and is therefore affected the most by interventions with a positive impact on these areas in particular. Based on an analysis of the data in [DataPAQ](#), we have selected the following indicators with corresponding research reasoning:

Children aged 3–5 in kindergartens

Pre-school education in the Czech environment has a strong effect on the reading and mathematical literacy of students (PAQ Research, 2021), and also depends on the parents' education predicting their awareness in the early placement of their child in school (Straková & Simonová, 2015).² A single year of compulsory pre-school attendance is therefore insufficient for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, for whom two years in kindergarten increases the estimated likelihood of enrollment in a regular (rather than special needs) elementary school by about 10 percentage points (PAQ Research, 2021,³ analysis of Roma Survey data, 2011).

Students per full time pedagogical assistant (PA)

The utilization of support measures and positions is an important indicator of the schools' ability to take advantage of the support offered by the state in order to increase the success of disadvantaged students. A Danish study has shown that, thanks to a year-long intervention of a staff member equivalent to a pedagogical assistant in the Czech context, students with special educational needs (SEN) were able to complete both elementary and secondary schools at the same rate as their peers without SEN

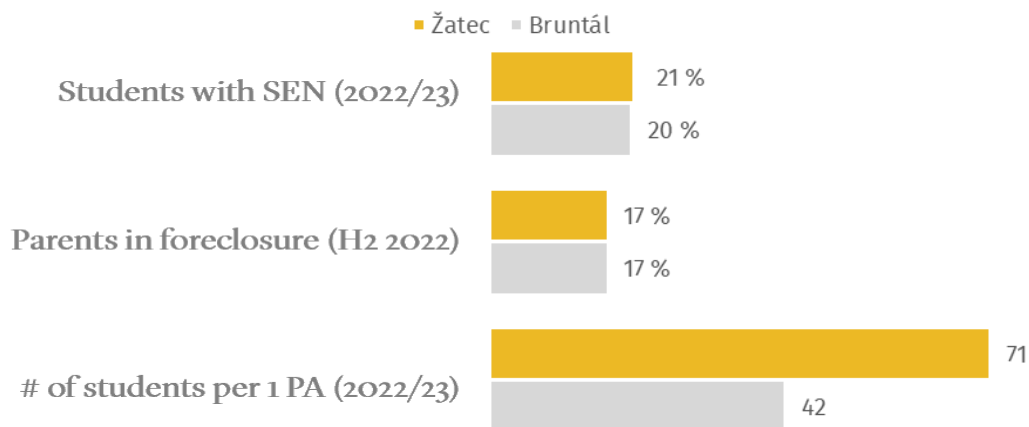
² STRAKOVÁ, J., SIMONOVÁ, J. Výběr základní školy v ČR a faktory, které jej ovlivňují. *Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review*, 2015, 51(4), 587-606. doi: 10.13060/00380288.2015.51.4.208.

³ PAQ Research (PROKOP, D., KORBEL, V., DVOŘÁK, T., MARKOVÁ, L., GARDOSHIKOVÁ, D.), think-tank IDEA (GROSSMANN, J., KORBEL, V., KRAJČOVÁ, J., MÜNICH, D.). *Nerovnosti ve vzdělávání jako zdroj neefektivity*, 2021.

(Andersen et al., 2023).⁴ The study further confirms the financial efficiency of these measures, as the annual cost of the assistant's intervention is lower than the cost of the student's complete attendance at a special needs school.

When comparing socio-economically identical Bruntál and Žatec, with similar numbers of students enrolled in elementary school, students with SEN and the proportion of parents in debt distress, we find that the provision of pedagogical assistants differs greatly in these regions. In Žatec, there are 27 more children per full-time AP than in Bruntál (for the details, see [DataPAQ](#)).

Graph 2: Comparison of two socially identical MEPs in terms of utilization of support provided by a pedagogical assistant



Source: DataPAQ

Students with Special Educational Needs due to a Different Cultural Background or Other Living Conditions (SEN CLC)

Z. Němec (2023)⁵ describes children with SEN CLC as “students in whose education significant barriers can be identified as a result of socially conditioned (i.e. non-medical) causes.” Using this definition, schools and counseling centers should identify them and support them by measures in the form of extra tutoring, assistants or material support. As in the case of the indicator on pedagogical assistant utilization, this is a reflection on how the players in the territory are able to collaborate and take advantage of options for the educational failure reduction being offered by the system. The

⁴ CALMAR ANDERSEN, S., BEUCHERT, L., SKYT NIELSEN, H., KJÆRGAARD THOMSEN, M. *The Effect of Teacher's Aides in the Classroom: Evidence from a Randomized Trial*. *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 2020, Year 18, Volume 1, pp. 469-505.

⁵ NĚMEC, Z. *Identifikace žáků se sociálním znevýhodněním v základní škole*. 1st edition. Praha: Národní pedagogický institut České republiky, 2023. ISBN 978-80-7578-129-1. Available at [Edu.cz](#).

territory of MEP Litvínov holds a record in the utilization of SEN CLC: over a period of 5 years, it has increased its share of SEN CLC by 15 percentage points (from 2% to 17%) thanks to the field office of an educational and psychological counseling center (EPCC) directly at Litvínov Elementary School.

The factors described above: children's kindergarten attendance, the provision of pedagogical assistants (PAs) and the identification of children with SEN CLC can be seen as possible key reasons as to why Litvínov, Kadaň and Rýmařov are among the MEPs with significantly lower failure rates than would be expected under these social conditions.

Municipality with extended powers (MEP)	Educational failure in relation to social conditions (2023)	Destabilizing poverty (2023)	Children aged 3–5 in kindergartens (2020/21)	Children aged 3–5 in kindergartens (2022/23)	Students per full time pedagogical assistant (2021/22)	Students per full time pedagogical assistant (2022/23)	Students with SEN CLC (2017/18)	Students with SEN CLC (2022/23)
Litvínov	significantly lower than expected	very high	76.3%	79.2%	47.8	39.2	2.1%	17.2%
Kadaň	significantly lower than expected	very high	87.0%	89.6%	44.2	42.8	1.5%	3.6%
Rýmařov	significantly lower than expected	very high	88.5%	93.4%	75	51.9	0.5%	0.8%

Source: DataPAQ

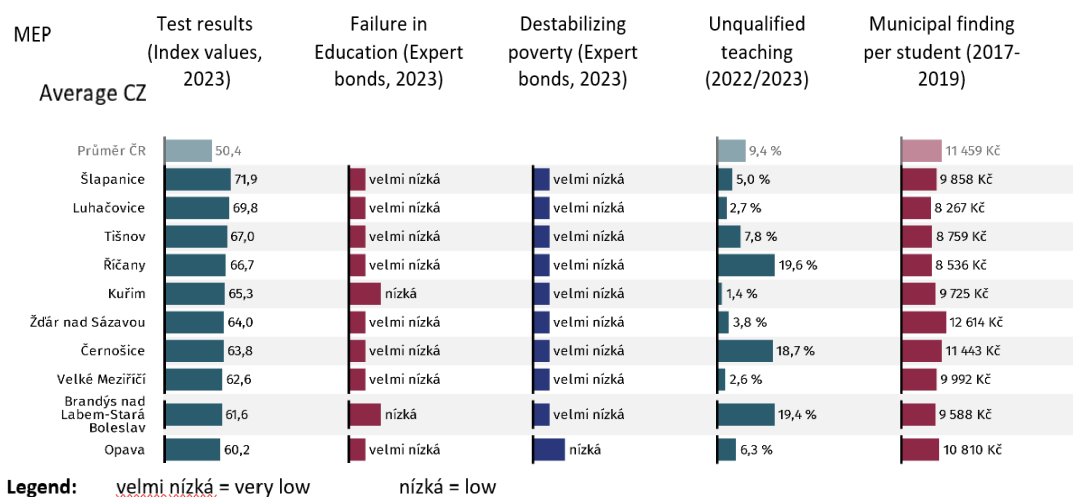
Data Do Not Suffice for the Search for the Causes Behind Good Educational Outcomes

The goal of a follow-up quality survey will be to search for a higher level of this index outside regional seats, so that areas without an above-average concentration of capital would stand out, and so as to be able to identify territories with quality pedagogical management of schools, quality teaching and statutory authorities concerned about the quality and status of education in their territories.

Finding MEPs with the above-described educational qualities is not an easy task because the indicators which seemingly ought to impact the index of educational outcomes do not relate to the same. The share of unqualified teaching, which is very high in Říčany and Český Brod, does not correspond to the outcomes, nor does the

teaching assessment carried out by the CSI. It is above average only in the case of Luhačovice, and actually below average in Rožnov pod Radhoštěm and Polička. Český Brod indicates that students may drop out or play truant even in a territory with quality schools. With a view to these circumstances, there will be a focus on Luhačovice in the qualitative part of the study. Its smaller size means it can be generalized for the purposes of multiple MEPs as the practice described can be adopted by large cities as well.

Educational outcomes are highest in municipalities with good socio-economic conditions, but cannot be inferred from the proportion of unskilled teaching or school funding



Source: [DataPAQ](#)

Case Studies

MEP Kadaň overcomes educational failure by housing interventions and the professional quality of social services

MEP Kadaň in the Ústí nad Labem Region was chosen for the analysis thanks to the town's proactive approach to the resolution of its housing crises which, by extension, helps reduce educational failure. Despite the high level of destabilizing poverty, 90% of students aged 3–5 attend kindergarten, which is higher than the average for the Ústí nad Labem Region by 6 percentage points. While one full time pedagogical assistance covers 57 students on average in the Ústí nad Labem Region, the figure is 42 in Kadaň. In Kadaň, 5.5% of students fail to complete elementary school, with the average for the Ústí nad Labem Region being 9% and for socially similar MEPs 8%, respectively.

Context of the social situation and education in the region

Kadaň (18 thousand inhabitants) is a town with socially excluded locations — Prunéřov and Hradec u Kadaně. The town has been addressing the housing situation in Prunéřov and Kadaň in a responsible manner since the 1990s.

There are 6 elementary schools and 8 kindergartens, including non-public and special needs schools, in Kadaň. Socially disadvantaged students attend especially the special needs school, as well as ES Školní, where they account for approximately one fifth of all the students. In the neighboring Klášterec nad Ohří (14.5 thousand inhabitants), there are 3 elementary schools and 1 kindergarten in several locations and under a single directorate. A higher share of socially disadvantaged students can be found in ES Školní and ES Petlerská. ES Krátká, in contrast, is viewed as exclusive by the locals. The schools are supported by NGOs, *Tilia*, *Světlo Kadaň*, *Naděje* or *Charita Kadaň*.

In 2022, 3.4% of children were experiencing a housing crisis in MEP Kadaň which is triple the Czech Republic's average, and 18.8% of the parents were in debt distress (double the Czech Republic's average).

Good Practice Examples

A housing ready system

The former mayor of Kadaň, Jiří Kulhánek, started working on improving housing conditions in the socially excluded location of Prunéřov with Agentura pro sociální začleňování (Agency for Social Inclusion). A housing ready system was created:

“We have introduced a housing ready concept. I view it as motivation for the parents. We have created the first two levels, and one can move on from a basic unfurnished apartment to the second category. For people to qualify for the second category, their children have to go to school and they have to work and reduce their debt. If they can make it work in the second category, they are assisted by a staff member and go on to the center. Prunéřov is owned by the town and we can work with it. They have self-government, each house has its janitor, they decorate and clean it.”

Jiří Kulhánek, former mayor of Kadaň

Expert quality and support to schools by the statutory authorities in addressing educational failure

In collaboration with the Agency for Social Inclusion, Klášterec nad Ohří designed a plan for social inclusion in the area of social services and education. This resulted in project Start (adaptation programs in kindergartens/elementary schools, tutoring clubs, pedagogical assistants in kindergartens/elementary schools) which was implemented in 2017—2019. Department head Zdena Janichová described its further course:

“That was a very successful project. All the schools became involved, obtained a number of teaching supplies and were able to take advantage of assistant positions. We called them ‘little social workers’ or ‘teacher’s eyes’. The schools then followed up on the project and became massively involved in EU programme deployed in Czechia under the name ‘Šablony’. Since then, social workers have been meeting with the statutory authority. A platform for social service providers was created at the municipality level. We meet twice a year. We share new information and talk about various changes. In addition, an inclusive club and a debt management counseling center were created, and SASka (social activation service, author’s note) started working here.”

Zdena Janichová, head of the department of education, Klášterec nad Ohří

Klášterec has well-established communication between schools and the body for social and legal protection of children (OSPOD) based in Kadaň. Staff members of the department of social services meet with guidance counselors on a regular basis and are available at any time in emergencies. The guidance counselor passes on problems and obtains initial information so that social workers can take action in the family. Each social worker from the department has one elementary school and one kindergarten in her care. It is therefore simple to identify five-year-olds who fail to enroll in kindergarten. The social workers divide the children who fail to turn up for enrollment by districts and search for the reasons behind such failure.

Participation in pre-school education is further facilitated by *Open Days* and *Free Play Days* anybody can attend. The children and the parents look around the kindergarten and find that “nobody bites” in there. Kindergarten and elementary school principals meet on both a formal and informal basis and share information about the needs of the individual families. If, for example, an elementary school principal is admitting children from a kindergarten, the kindergarten teachers or assistants are in contact with the elementary school teachers and assistants. Educators visit one another at school for this purpose and share information.

Economically disadvantaged children are supported by the town by way of immediate material assistance when they need to pay for field trips or skiing trips. The statutory authority further encourages the schools to participate in the *Darujme kroužky dětem* project (*Donate extracurricular activities*), and the participating children are given CZK 2,000 per term, to be used in the local youth center (DDM; the activities cost between CZK 300 and 600 per year).

Schools are full of supporting positions and linked to field workers and other services

There is a high utilization rate for supporting positions. The schools have guidance counselors or special educators. Utilization of staff members with a similar scope of activities but a different designation is an interesting phenomenon. These include *special education, social educator, assistant for socially disadvantaged children* or

inclusion coordinator. Their task is the same: to bring together the school, family, town and social activation services.

“The task of the assistant for socially disadvantaged children is to watch over his/her charges. If a student falls under mandatory school attendance but fails to come to school, the assistant calls the parents to find out why the student was not excused. If school supplies are missing, the assistant makes inquiries as to what the problem is and tries to act as a mediator between the teachers and the family. In some cases, the assistants also help in the leisure activity center.”

Jiří Kypta, Principal, ES Petlorská, Klášterec nad Ohří

Free lunches are virtually a standard in locations with above-average educational failure. All the schools with socially disadvantaged children in Kadaň and Klášterec use them. In some cases, lunches are a strong motivation for children's school attendance.

Networking among NGOs fills the requisite room for intervention between the family, school and authorities

Between 2010 and 2012, intense networking between the providers of social-activation services in the territory was commenced. Fluctuation among staff members providing services is very low. The Pruněřov location is a good example of interconnection of services. There are prevention specialists, a municipal manager, an inclusive facility and a debt counseling center. Most of the services are located in a single building at Pruněřov 377, operated by the *Světlo Kadaň* association.

A list of activities pursued by various non-governmental organizations which includes the testimonies of the personages involved was created in order to provide an efficient and brief explanation of positive interventions in MEP Kadaň:

- **Inclusion of children in support services:** *Světlo Kadaň* finds children for its inclusive facility by visiting schools and speaking of its activities. In addition, students join thanks to the “snowball effect” whereby the initial group of users grow as their friends join.
- **Career advice for socially disadvantaged adolescents:** As of 2016, *Světlo Kadaň* has been implementing a project focused on career and work advice, with the related motivation of socially disadvantaged students to enroll in vocational training. The promotion of the programs relevant at schools is also important:

“We go into those schools a lot. The school will invite us to parent-teacher meetings. Leaflets are distributed. The school also invites us to the first day of school, we speak with the children, tell them what we can do for them and when they can come to us.”

Filip Ráža, director of the children's and youth services section, *Světlo Kadaň*

- **Long arm of the authority in the field:** Staff members of *Tilia Kadaň* are “gate keepers” facilitating access to socially disadvantaged families and thanks to their field work, they connect them with the authorities (screening):

“We oversee a family which informed the city that they were moving to Hradec, and there was a need to establish what their living conditions are. We go there, introduce ourselves, inform the family that we need information for OSPOD, and whether they consent. We give them information about K-centrum and put them in touch with Charita Kadaň.”

Kateřina Fišerová, social worker, *Tilia Kadaň*

- **Development of parental competences:** Schools request assistance from an organization in the development of parental competences. These include the basics of good hygiene, orientation in time and space, observation of daily routines or home preparation with the children, the goal of these activities being to prepare the child for kindergarten/elementary school attendance.

“The worker visits the family and meets the mother and the child, and together they work on managing school lessons. English is often a problem. If they have cell phones, we show them how the mother should do it. They have good workbooks and we also use textbooks to show the parents how it works and how they should study with the children. Regularity is of key importance. The parents are not used to it – they think five minutes is enough.”

Kateřina Fišerová, social worker, *Tilia Kadaň*

Above-average Results in Luhačovice Stem from the Work of Competent Principals, Teachers and Statutory Authorities

According to the data, Luhačovice boasts the lowest rate of early dropouts from elementary schools in the Czech Republic as a whole (0.3% on average in 2019/20–2022/23). Although this territory is virtually unaffected by socio-economic problems, educational outcomes surpass⁶ the already good social situation. This phenomenon can be explained by the high quality of work of principals and teachers, as further confirmed by CSI’s data which provide a very positive assessment of the activities taking place at Luhačovice schools.

⁶ Test results in the context of social conditions yield a rate expressing whether the students’ test results are lower, higher or commensurate to the social conditions prevailing in the region. The analysis predicts what the test results in a region with the given levels of destabilizing poverty and socio-economical disadvantages ought to be. The predicted value is compared to reality. The results in Luhačovice are slightly better than expected (1 out of 15 MEPs in the Czech Republic).

Evaluation of primary schools in MEP Luhačovice based on CSI data



Municipality with extended powers /MEP)	Strategic management in primary schools (index quintiles, 2018-2022)	Strategic management in primary schools (index values, 2018-2022)	Teaching and learning outcomes in primary schools (index quintiles, 2018-2022)	Teaching and learning outcomes in primary schools (index values, 2018-2022)	Students and their support in primary schools (index quintiles, 2018-2022)	Students and their support in primary schools (index values, 2018-2022)
Average CZ		2,213		2,172		2,036
Luhačovice Zlín Region	above average	2,036	above average	1,905	above average	2,000

Source: [DataPAQ](#)

Context of the social situation and education in the region

MEP Luhačovice does not suffer from serious socio-economic problems. The debt distress of the parents, the housing crisis and unemployment are below the Czech Republic's average. Luhačovice is not a large regional center and compared to other MEPs with good educational outcomes (Liberec, Plzeň, Hradec Králové, České Budějovice), the concentration of social capital there is not all that high, which is why it is of importance to explore why Luhačovice's educational outcomes are better than its social conditions would suggest.

Economic and social conditions in MEP Luhačovice

Municipality with extended powers /MEP)	Parents in foreclosure (H1, 2022)	Children in housing need (2022)	Unemployment (2018)	destabilising poverty (expert bands, 2023)
Average CZ	13,2 %	1,7 %	3,0 %	
Luhačovice Zlín Region	5,1 %	0,4 %	2,0 %	very low

Source: [DataPAQ](#)

There are 10 kindergartens and 11 elementary schools (of all types and statutory authorities) in the territory. Most of the elementary schools are small composite class schools or have only junior elementary school grades. Fully organized schools are in Luhačovice and Slavičín, and we have further included ES Pozlovice which only has junior elementary school grades in our research interviews.

Schools and municipalities in MEP Luhačovice



Municipality with extended powers /MEP)	# of kindergartens (2022/23)	# of primary schools (2022/23)	# of municipalities to 500 inhabitants (2022/23)	# of municipalities with 501 - 1000 inhabitants (2022/23)	# of municipalities with > 1000 inhabitants (2022/23)
CZ Total	5,431	4,252	3,385	1,374	1,491
CZ Average	26	21	16	7	7
Luhačovice Zlín Region	10	11	6	6	3

Source: [DataPAQ](#)

Good Practice Examples

School concept

The schools have diverse visions. ES Luhačovice not only focuses on regular teaching but also supports gifted children. The principal in Slavičín relies on a number of priorities, including teamwork, acquisition of foreign languages, sports, prevention, etc. The smaller ES Pozlovice is aware of its limits and its junior grades focus in particular on the development of reading and mathematical literacy.

What all the schools concerned have in common is that in addition to a concept of work with students and lessons, the principals view good relations among the faculty as a priority.

“If the employee is content, he/she works well. Over the course of the year, I focused on talking to the people. I introduced an open principal’s office system. They can discuss professional, and pedagogical, as well as personal topics there, so that I know that when there is a problem, I should not put pressure on them. I create suitable conditions and accommodate them. I also studied the burnout syndrome in my doctoral studies. I had a rough idea about what the people needed: new impulses all the time so that they do not fade, so that they have new interests ...“

Pavel Macek, Principal, ES Slavičín

Working with teachers and their mutual cooperation

Work with teachers requires a safe environment as described in the previous paragraph. This makes it possible for the principal to observe lessons or for teachers to visit one another in class. In Slavičín, after teachers visit their colleague in class, they merely discuss and are not supposed to make any evaluations. The principal himself observes around 37 lessons per term in this small school. In ES Luhačovice, every teacher has to visit 3 colleagues in class during the year.

New teaching methods are introduced at schools with a view to the pace followed by both students and teachers

The managed teams of teachers reflecting on their work provide a suitable environment for creative teaching strategies and new methods. At ES Pozlovice, mathematics is therefore taught using the Hejrný method, while reading instruction employs the Sfumato method (blended reading). A non-invasive approach reflecting the pace of both the student and the teacher is essential in the utilization of new methods:

“We are using the Sfumato method on a full scale. All our textbooks and supplies have been adapted to the method. As for the Hejrný method, it is up to each teacher to include the method when he or she sees fit. We use the Hejrný method for less than 50%, so as not to confuse the children. We include it when possible.”

Přemysl Janeček, Principal, ES Pozlovice

The innovative Pozlovice school has implemented a work culture based on the idea that the art of using new approaches cannot be taken for granted. They hold formative evaluations enabling the teachers to realize where there is room for improvement. The teachers therefore meet twice a month, share their success or lack thereof in the formative evaluation, and seek inspiration and advice from their colleagues.

Organization of teaching develops both interdisciplinary relations and gifted students

According to Principal Pavel Kurtin from Luhačovice, it is good for the interconnection of subjects to be natural. This can be achieved for instance by connecting music, physics and IT lessons. When the lesson is about sound, a tone can be played and recorded on computer and the material used to describe physical phenomena.

Increasingly discussed *tandem teaching* is also used at ES Slavičín. As a result of greater requirements for the utilization of technologies in the teaching process (a minor modification of the Framework Education Program), experienced Czech teachers are brought together with young IT specialists to introduce working with tablets into the classroom.

At the time of the interview, a major change in the teaching of gifted students was underway at ES Luhačovice. After three years, the new principal decided not to concentrate the gifted students in one class with a view to different forms of teacher's work and the possibility of enriching other students through interaction with their gifted peers:

“We will address this during the school year (2023/2024). I've met with resistance from the teachers. Teaching a class composed of gifted students is very nice but the teacher does not deal with accountability issues, and I do not like that. I met with resistance from the school board and some of the teachers. One of my responses was that this is how grade 1–5 teachers do it. They need to individualize their teaching – the faster

students are assigned extra work. I use gifted students as assistants – when they are done, they go and work with their schoolmates. I have no doubt that my employees will deal with this change successfully. “

Pavel Kurtin, Principal, ES Luhačovice

Cooperation with the statutory authorities

The statutory authorities specifically help schools by reducing the volume of administrative activities. One of them is the delegation of responsibility for the management of large reconstruction projects. The principals are not detached from the process in such cases, and were asked what building modifications they would appreciate.

“We tell them what we need, what changes we would like to make in the classroom, and they then carry out everything else. When project financing is used for the reconstruction, they deal with the documentation.”

Přemysl Janeček, Principal, ES Pozlovice

Slavičín also evaluates the principals. The principals attend a meeting of the municipal council and are given time to discuss the annual report, evaluate the achievement of the defined goals and the further progress of the school’s vision.

The cooperation between the statutory authorities and schools in MEP Luhačovice is generally very good. In Luhačovice proper, the statutory authority does not focus only on reducing the principals’ administrative burden but maintains informal relations and exhibits an active interest in the school’s life, as described by the Principal of ES Luhačovice, Pavel Kurtin:

“I am not the only one to carry the weight. The town views the school as a priority, not only before the elections but at all times, really. I am happy to have the statutory authority I have. We work together a lot. The mayor will drop in for a cup of coffee and a chat. He is really interested – and that is how most of the work is done. We have meetings of principals of all the schools and facilities: kindergarten, the leisure time center. As for large investments – I told the town that I am not a project manager or a company with four accountants to be able to handle that. We are currently doing building alterations for 4 million and the town is handling that. I am merely on the building supervisor’s team to make sure that the stuff works in the school environment.”

Pavel Kurtin, Principal, ES Luhačovice

Recommendations for the Czech Republic

The recommendations are divided into two areas: reduction of educational failure and support for the pedagogical quality of schools. The above-mentioned interventions were based on a quantity and quality analysis of the territories of MEP Kadaň and MEP Luhačovice.

Available steps to reduce educational failure from the perspective of schools, statutory authorities or social activation services:

Statutory authorities

- Introduction of the housing ready system based on the gradual expansion of the municipal housing stock and the establishment of motivating criteria for tenants – employment, debt reduction, school attendance.
- Founder's involvement in the coordination of groups of actors (schools, NGOs, municipal departments, OSPOD) for the purpose of regular sharing of information and definition of goals and activities. The option of using existing groups from projects such as Local Action Plans for the Development of Education (MAP). Maximum focus on connecting the social department and services, families and schools.
- Support aimed at improving the children's material conditions: administrative assistance in projects such as *Obědy zdarma (Free Lunches)* or introduction of instant material benefits to be used to pay for school activities (trips, courses).

Schools

- Reduction of barriers to participation of socially disadvantaged children in education due to insufficient material resources, e.g., through projects such as *Free Lunches*, free extracurricular activities, school supplies or payment for school activities.
- Ensuring there are sufficient supporting positions such as pedagogical assistants, special or social educators.
- Ensuring smooth transition of students from kindergarten to elementary school through mutual communication between teachers, including on site visits and meetings with specific students and parents. Introduction of programs for socially disadvantaged students focusing on preparation for lessons, including parental involvement.
- Utilization of social activation services to reduce educational failure: career advice, development of parental competences, assistance in cases of school attendance problems, sharing of information about the children's family background.

How to achieve better student outcomes using work culture at schools and actively interested statutory authorities

Statutory authorities

- Selection and assessment of principals on the basis of their focus on teachers' pedagogical work (translated into the school's concept and evaluation in annual reports). Assessment of principals which is not based on performance indicators, such as student participation in knowledge contests. Methodological recommendations of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports can be used as inspiration.
- Reduction of the administrative burden of school principals. Sharing of administrative staff capacities with school principals, especially in project management. Participation in public procurement (e.g., furnishing of the dining hall or reconstruction). This ideally involves the assumption of responsibility for the management of the school building by the municipal technician, or administration of large scale and minor building alterations, including inviting the school principal to cooperate.

Schools

- Establishing a safe work culture where the principal's visit in class is not tantamount to inspection and criticism.
- Coordination of the system of mutual observation and reflection with clearly set dates and a number of observation visits. Teachers do not have to write reports on observed lessons but can focus on discussion only. The reports have the advantage of feedback for the principals.
- Innovation of the teaching process by gradual steps taking both the teacher and the students into account. Introduction of new methods, such as formative evaluation or tandem teaching, has to be based on the joint reflection of the teachers where they share their successes and failures, find mutual inspiration and search for approaches for improvement.

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