

## **MONITORING THE ISSUE OF CHILDREN AT RISK IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC**

### **The basic starting point of the project**

“Children at risk” is defined as a child **whose natural development is threatened**. This natural mental development can be threatened by two – sometimes mutually overlapping - factors:

- The risk of organic (physical) damage
- The risk from the social environment.

In the first stage the monitoring focussed on help during risks **stemming from the social environment**.

### **Monitoring results**

The following two areas give a basic insight into the serious problems that must be solved:

**1. Spontaneously presented problems** – every respondent freely wrote down the 3 main problems in the area of children at risk

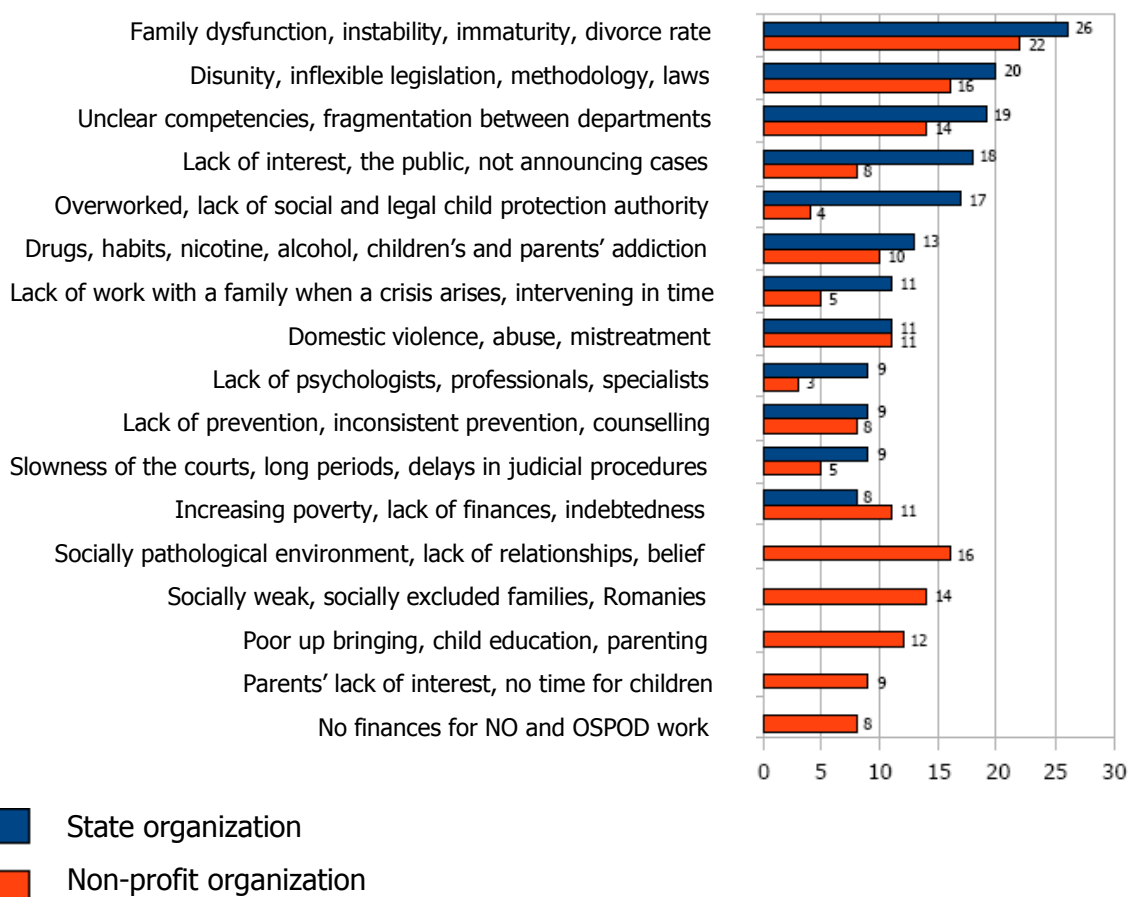
**2. The seriousness of the problem and their satisfaction with the solution** – a definition of the most burning problem in a combination of these two criteria

For these areas there were:

- 229 respondents from 191 state institutions
- 304 respondents from 221 organisations from the non-profit sector

The in-depth interviews with 47 professionals on children’s problems, supplemented by public opinion from 1203 respondents, were also taken into consideration.

## 1. COMPARING SPONTANEOUSLY PRESENTED PROBLEMS IN CARING FOR CHILDREN AT RISK BETWEEN STATE INSTITUTIONS AND NON-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS

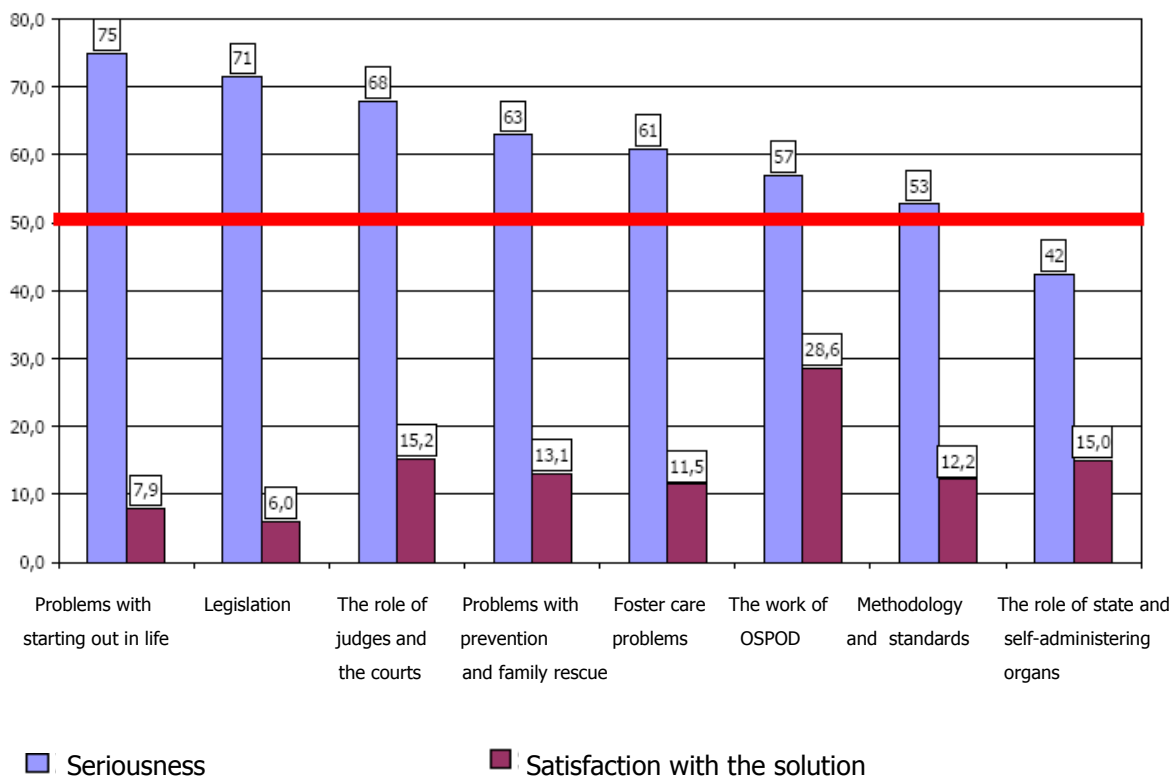


On the basis of the spontaneous reactions of respondents from non-profit organisations and the state sphere the most serious problem was deemed to be **poorly functioning families**, above all their instability, immaturity or a socially pathological environment and socially excluded families

The second most mentioned problem is the **legislation and methodology** enabling suitable help to be given to children and their families.

**The unclear competencies of those involved** in solving the issue and the **fragmentation between departments** was also seen as an important problem by the respondents

## 2. COMPARING THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE PROBLEMS AND THE STATE ADMINISTRATION'S AND NON-PROFIT SECTOR'S SATISFACTION WITH THE SOLUTIONS



Children starting out in life from institutional and foster care was seen as **one of the most important problems**. Among OSPOD and public QUANGO workers it was seen as the most pressing problem (89 %), among NO workers it was seen as the second most important problem (82 %). In all less than 10 % of professionals are satisfied with its solution. Despite this perceived seriousness correspondents were agreed that it is a lack of facilities and professionals dealing with children leaving a foster family or state institution. Therefore it is necessary to emphasise that **there is no methodology or work standards dealing with these children and the procedures for integrating them into society**.

From the in-depth interviews our experts and respondents mainly criticised the role of the courts and judges due to their **insensitive decisions** that are generally only on the basis of the legal norms without looking at the fate of the child in question. From the standpoint of the child's perception and experience of time the courts' **decision making is slow**, the judges often resort to the institute of **preliminary ruling, which places the child into a care institute**, extending the period for the decision several times over, as permitted by law, this being even in cases where it is not exactly necessary.

The in-depth interview respondents often mentioned the **large amount of legislative norms and measures**, which in part **mutually contradict** and in part **do not cover the issue entirely**. In their opinion it is caused by both the large amount of state organs concerned in the matter and the lack of interest of lawmakers to resolve this problem. OSPOD workers see **their departments coming under the municipality's competence** as a legislative problem. **Municipalities are often uninterested** in resolving the issue and cut departmental budgets. A large problem in the legislation, particularly from respondents from the nursery institutes and children's homes, is the **institution of "demonstrable interest"** by the biological parents for a neglected, abused, mistreated, or discarded child, which halts adoption and the child being handed over to a foster family. Although all agree on the importance of prevention and family rescue **this is the least engaged in area** in caring for children at risk, only a few subjects carry it out.

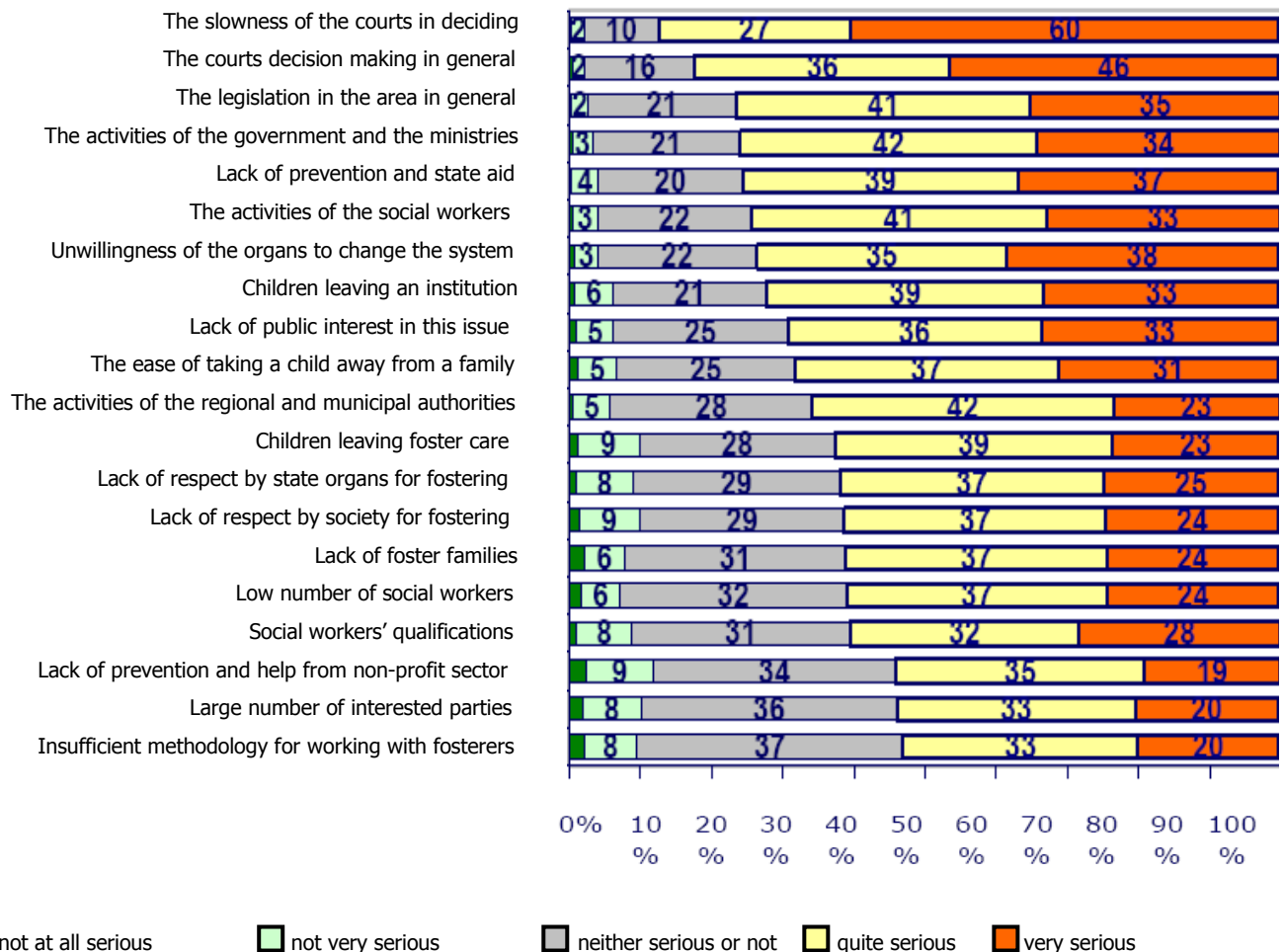
All rescue work is based on the fact that a **family at risk will find the family rescue centre**. **There is no prevention system** that seeks out families at risk and hands them over (instead of to the court) to help and rescue.

The fact that there is no **methodology for diagnosing and seeking out cases** of children at risk in the population can be considered a problem. Another problem in this area is the fact that, likewise, the OSPOD organs **do not have a set methodology and standards for working with children at risk**. Similarly **the methodology of the non-profit organs entrusted with carrying out the social and legal protection of children is, in certain cases, debatable**. It was never consulted upon from a professional standpoint and, on the whole, arose through practice, criticism and assessment **is not** part of the procedure for awarding authorisation to carry out the social and legal protection of children.

The issue of replacement family care is significantly contained by the non-profit sector, methodologically and content wise it has been described in detail, education is ongoing, etc. however this area still meets with:

- **A lack of foster families**
- The related legislative problem that we do not have a **professional foster care institute**
- **The long waiting time for a decision on placement** to a family.
- The state's lack of attention to the negative attitude of certain state organs to fosterers and the social and material evaluation of foster families.

### 3. PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE SERIOUSNESS OF PROBLEMS FOR CARING FOR CHILDREN AT RISK



The Czech population considers **the slowness of the courts in deciding in this area** to be the most serious problem 82 % of respondents thought courts decided outside of the child's interests and 68 % believed it was too easy for a court to take a child away from its parents.

87 % of workers in the non-profit sector are convinced of the slowness of the courts, 72 % of them of the courts poor decision making from the standpoint of the child's interests, 70 % on the misuse of provisions enabling a child to be placed in care.

Among OSPOD and QUANGO workers 77 % are convinced of the slowness of the courts' decision making and 70 % of the courts' poor decision making from the standpoint of the child's interests.