

# Awen Amenca, z.s. and Community Organizing as a Form of Empowerment

The organization focuses on advocacy for equal access to education through empowering Roma parents and communities.

The **H.E.L.P. (Movement for the Existence of Human Rights) project, funded by OPZ+ No. 44**, focuses on **organizing Romani communities in Ostrava-Přívov and Prague 14**.

The project uses a community organizing methodology **to help engage community members in active problem solving**. Topics addressed by the communities include promoting school desegregation and improving housing conditions. Overall, the project aims **to strengthen the capacity of Roma communities to assert their rights**. The project implementation period is from the beginning of January 2024 to the end of December 2025.

## MAIN FINDINGS

### CAMPAIGN RESULTS

The community in Ostrava-Přívov focused on solving problems related to rental housing in the first campaign. The community managed **to organize a meeting of apartment owners with tenants**, thanks to which community participants said that it improved mutual communication.

In Prague 14, **a meeting on the topic of housing was held** with representatives of the municipality.

### IMMEDIATE "FIELD" SUPPORT

The team works and lives close to the community, maintains relationships with participants, and is familiar with their needs. This allows them to **respond quickly to unexpected situations**. One example is the September 2024 floods in the Přívov district of Ostrava, when the local team **assisted in managing the aftermath**. Another positive outcome was **negotiating the preservation of housing** in cases of unexpected delays in rent payments.

### DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS AND SELF-CONFIDENCE

Campaign preparation involves **practical workshops** where participants take responsibility for sub-tasks. They learn how to write official emails, draft complaints, organise meetings or facilitate debates. This develops not only their **skills but also the group's ability to promote common interests**.

“  
We want to equip them with knowledge and skills so they can operate independently. We hope they will be motivated, know what to do, and whom to turn to if needed.  
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(The Leader of the Prague team on empowering community participants)



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## CHANGES IN THE LIVES OF THE TARGET GROUP

The project strengthened **the practical skills of the target group**, enabled more effective problem solving and increased the self-confidence of the participants.

They learned **how to deal with authorities and landlords, organise community events and advocate for changes**, such as repairs to flats or better communication with the municipality.

The experience and skills gained also **helped individuals manage other challenges**, such as addressing discrimination in schools or ensuring access to health care.

## PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY ORGANISING

gradual involvement of the most active members of the community as potential leaders

experience success

organizing a specific sub-step in solving a problem

Thorough understanding of the group's situation and its problems

Ongoing evaluation of the progress of community organizing with community leaders

informal meetings to promote interest and trust (e.g. joint barbecues)

focusing on authentic community issues based on the needs of the community while helping to identify problems perceived as the norm

## IMPLEMENTATION EXPERIENCE

By implementing the project in two locations at once, **the team can reflect contextual differences**. For example, the team found the Ostrava community to be more active, while in Prague it was better able to cooperate with the local authorities.

**An obstacle to cooperation with the local government may be its political composition** - while some political parties are indifferent to Roma issues, others are even racist.

The team perceives a trend where **social work is moving increasingly towards an approach away from providing material assistance and services towards empowerment work**.



“They explained everything to us, and it really helped. Nowadays, a child doesn't need a doctor's note in their school record for a short illness, but the school used to require it. Now I know they don't have the right to demand that. It's enough to call the doctor, and she'll tell me what to do with the child.”

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(Community Participant)



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