



Stronger



Resilient

Enhancing access to social services in rural Posázaví, Czechia



SUMMARY

Since 2019, the social work outreach initiative 'Bring Villages Closer to the People' works to **bring social services closer to small rural communities**. The project cooperates closely with key stakeholders in rural communities, including 20 municipalities, schools, food banks, and other leaders and service providers. Social workers identify and reach vulnerable people, providing both short-term and long-term assistance. The project has created four jobs for field social workers across rural municipalities and benefits hundreds of individuals annually.



CONTEXT

The mainly rural Posázaví region is home to 60 000 people, a significant portion of whom reside in small villages and communities scattered throughout the countryside. This demographic distribution poses significant challenges for individuals living in remote areas, particularly for vulnerable groups such as seniors, chronically ill patients, single parents and individuals facing social exclusion.

To address this situation, connecting social services and small communities and individuals, the charities Posázaví and RUAH applied for a European Social Fund (ESF) grant in 2019.

Theme(s): Access to services, health and care, social inclusion

Country: Czechia

Organisations: Posázaví charitable company in cooperation with RUAH charitable company

Start & end date: 01/2023 – 12/2025

Budget: EUR 399 800

Funding sources:

- European Social Fund (ESF and ESF+)
- Local municipalities' donations

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OBJECTIVES

- > Enhance the accessibility of public services for rural residents, especially those in a vulnerable situation.





ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

The RUAH charity organisation, experienced in providing home care and outreach respite care, identified in 2019 a pressing need for improved access to public services in isolated rural areas in the Posázaví region. The organisation started collaborating with the Benešov municipality to **identify the region's accessibility challenges**. Based on its findings, RUAH initiated the 'Bring Villages Closer to the People' project, co-funded by the ESF and local municipal donations.

The project, spanning from 2019 to 2022, enhanced the **accessibility of local municipalities and their services for rural residents**. Its successor project, the 'Outreach and Community Social Work in the Posázaví Region', began in 2023, led by the Posázaví charitable organisation. Working closely with rural communities, including over 20 municipalities, schools, food banks, and other service providers, the project seeks to eliminate access barriers through the assistance of social workers.

The project created four full-time field social worker positions in the rural municipalities of Týnecko, Sázavsko, Čerčansko, and Bystrčicko-Neveklovsko. These workers operate independently within their respective locations, while also collaborating as a Benešov-based team, ensuring a coordinated approach to all social services. Their flexibility, enabled by the use of fleet cars, allows to easily reach individuals, provide social counselling, connect them to necessary services, and support their social development.

The COVID pandemic and war in Ukraine highlighted the need for social workers in the Posázaví region. The project continued its operations during the lockdown period, with social workers identifying additional individuals in need and maintaining close contact with the established ones via phone calls.



RESULTS

During the 2019-2023 period, the project achieved the following results:

- > Social workers approached around 600 individuals, providing support both in person and over the phone. Some of them received over 40 working hours of support, with regular ongoing assistance.
- > Collaboration extended to over 20 local municipalities and 30 organisations within the social system.
- > Participation in round table discussions on social topics within the region facilitated close contact with key stakeholders such as the labour office, Benešov municipality, city police, and general practitioners.
- > Leveraging local knowledge enabled continuous assistance and the support of every crucial actor within the system, resulting in significant benefits for the individuals in need.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

- > **Breaking barriers between authorities and citizens:** the initiative focuses on overcoming obstacles that prevent individuals from accessing necessary services, such as fear of approaching civil servants, financial constraints inhibiting travel to municipalities, or health issues hindering mobility.
- > **Replicability and scalability:** the project is replicable beyond the ESF funding, highlighting the benefits of 'sharing' professional social workers with small towns or villages. This approach can bring significant advantages to the wider region and may lead to a welcome trend for similar projects across Czechia.
- > **Importance of cooperation:** establishing contacts and creating connections with key stakeholders, including mayors and regional leaders, is crucial. Thorough research into existing social services within the area is necessary, along with participation in relevant training and internships to gain insights into effective practices.
- > **Team dynamics and local knowledge sharing:** team spirit and active sharing of local knowledge are essential components of the initiative. Individuals in need and local municipalities greatly value this collaborative approach.

