This project was completed with the methodology book Participation and new approaches to working with children and families at risk: Studies inspired by experience from Switzerland, editors Igor Nosal and Irena Cechova. The book contains 7 chapters.

Chapter I. by Igor Nosal about participation of children in foster care deals with the question how to create the space for children to participate within the framework of work with the children at risk. The author presents the so-called „collaborative approach“ and the „solution focused approach“ as two useful ways to extend the participative practice. The study also describes the examples of good participation practice in Switzerland. The extensive practice of participation is presented in the context of the successfully functioning Swiss semi-direct democracy.

Pavel Navratil’s chapter II. concentrates on participation in context of quality in social services. All children have an important right to participate. This right is especially valuable for children in the child protection system (e.g. children at risk). Social workers have the key responsibility to facilitate and secure this. However, participation is not an easy process and can be really challenging. Children can participate in many ways - in matters that affect them personally or those that relate generally to children in need or to all young citizens. This paper refers to my experience in children’s home Riederenholz (St. Gallen, Switzerland) and to the research on all these aspects, drawing particularly on the views of the children themselves. While this paper focuses on children, many of the principles and practices promoting their participation are equally applicable to families and other service users.

Eva Janickova’s chapter III. is about working with dysfunctional families regarding best interests of the child. Chapter is devoted to the application of the “best interests of the child” with regard to the rights of the child and his status as a subject of law in different contexts when working with vulnerable families, especially in the area of divorce issues/matters. Attention is focused on ways of working with vulnerable families using examples of good practice from Switzerland, thus establishing cooperation between institutions and organizations providing services through direct work with families so that the family is motivated to cooperate and set goals lead to effective solutions of the situation by
strengthening the competences of the family. The support of family competences is undertaken from possible alternatives for communication with the family - through mediation, therapy oriented towards solutions, open cooperation between families and professionals. The theoretical findings are complemented by case studies as a basis for reflection on possible approaches when dealing with situations in which vulnerable families can find themselves.

In the following chapter IV. Social worker in the middle of family interactions Jitka Navratilova focuses on the question: “How to achieve through a participatory approach improvement of social functioning of families at risk, especially in terms of meeting the best interests of the child in these families”. I analyze selected dimensions of family life which contribute substantially to the functioning of the family. These dimensions create a useful framework that can help to understand which problematic interactions occur in families at risk and what way can be supported the implementation of the best interests of the child. Using the examples of good practice from Switzerland I suggest guidelines and methods of work with families with neglected children and provide suggestions how to achieve mutual understanding of parents and children with help of participation and how to improve their social functioning. My essay is theoretically anchored in a task-oriented approach, which creates a useful background for the application of participatory methods of work as well as it offers a series of practical guides for professionals working with families in their natural environment.

Chapter V. by Irena Cechova and Igor Nosal Working with foster families focuses on the participation of children in foster family care and the ways to extend the participation of children in foster families. The examples of good practice in Switzerland illustrate how important is to provide assistance to foster families. The important role of the warrants of participation is played there by the foster family assistants. The authors present the so called „Kit of Participation“, the guidelines how to initiate participation in foster families, as a useful instrument in foster care.

Chapter VI. Selection of Foster Families, Criteria for Selection and Methods of Testing by Simona Venclikova deals with the comparison of the overall approach and procedures in the selection of foster families in the Czech Republic and Switzerland. It is demonstrated that although both countries have relatively similar legislative frameworks, the practical selection of foster families and the subsequent preparation of the family greatly differ. This chapter
describes examples of good practice in Switzerland, where the selection of suitable foster parents, but also complex work with the whole family are dedicated considerably more time and energy. During the many years of experience, Switzerland has created certain rules that, while not being “the legal norm”, are respected by organizations because their violation would lead to the non-functioning of the selected foster families.

Chapter VII. Working with children from minorities in context of inclusive education by Irena Cechova focuses on problems in school system.

Equal access to education is considered to be the main objective of the current education policy in the Czech Republic and is directly related to the gradual reshaping of the established school system. In the Czech Republic, however, inclusive participatory pedagogical work with children is still a prerogative of a few good schools, enthusiastic teachers, but the promotion of an inclusive way of thinking as a fundamental systemic approach to working with children is still unsuccessful. In particular, this applies to children from ethnic minorities, whose position in Czech schools is still problematic. The unique inspiration of this text was my experience with inclusive work with children, with which I became familiar in the Swiss Wil, where the organization TIPITI operates this school called OBERSTUFENSCHULE WIL. With my contribution, I want to assist in the reflection of possibilities of working with disadvantaged children in the context of inclusive education and I ask myself the following question: On what basis can work with vulnerable children from minority ethnic groups rely on in the context of inclusive education in the Czech Republic?