

# Czechia Report

## Sustainable Governance Indicators 2024

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## Executive Summary

Developments during the review period have confirmed the successful establishment, development, and protection of basic democratic institutions. Procedures for selecting candidates and voting adhere to good international practices, and the government operates with reasonable transparency. Laws ensure freedom of information, with structures in place for parliamentary oversight, auditing by an independent office, and control by independent media. Additionally, government-wide and ministerial structures have been established for policy discussion and coordination, involving external stakeholders.

However, corruption and the close ties between political and economic power remain significant weaknesses. The media control by former Prime Minister Andrej Babiš was significantly reduced by the final approval in 2023 of amendments to the conflict-of-interest law, though these will be only partially effective. While political competition is not formally restricted, financial backing provides a substantial advantage, as seen in presidential elections where candidates heavily depend on business group support.

During this period, the government was a five-party coalition with a parliamentary majority. Although not always unified in its stance, the visibility of differences over EU policy, environmental, and gender issues encourages public debate. An active structure for tripartite consultation exists, involving the government, trade unions, and employers' organizations, alongside non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that advocate on various issues. Several NGO representatives are included in government advisory committees and have, in some cases, significantly influenced legislation.

The state budget has been the central issue in economic policy. Tax revenue as a share of GDP remains low by European standards, limiting the scope for investment and spending in other areas. The slow growth and increasing debt during the pandemic extended into 2023, with high inflation persisting. Slower income growth led to reduced consumption and a further GDP decline.

In response, the government introduced a 2023 package that cut spending and increased taxes, especially on businesses. Public sector employees and pensioners are the main losers, while cuts to government subsidies for

enterprises threaten other objectives. Assuming economic growth recovers despite budget restrictions and excluding external shocks, there is no imminent threat of budget instability.

Long-term prospects are also threatened by a general labor shortage. Foreign workers have partially filled the gap, but the integration of foreigners remains a persistent weakness, limiting the import of skilled labor. The influx of Ukrainian refugees has brought significant changes in this area and spurred some protest actions by extra-parliamentary groups opposing government economic policies, refugee aid, and support for Ukraine's war effort.

Addressing the labor shortage domestically is hampered by inadequate early childhood care facilities, reflecting a preference for encouraging parents to stay home with young children. Gender issues are viewed with suspicion by some political segments, concerned about perceived threats to the traditional family. Nevertheless, high employment levels have kept poverty relatively low, and the pension system has ensured adequate, though not high, pensions relative to average earnings. Social exclusion remains a serious issue for the Roma minority, who continue to face discrimination, as well as for other social groups.

Policies on infrastructure development, the environment, and climate change have aligned with EU directives, receiving strong support from some politicians and pressure groups, but evident reluctance from others. EU support has compensated for inadequate state budget resources. While this support is not permanent, the EU-funded National Recovery Plan offers assistance in various policy areas for the next few years.

Czechia has been passive in international initiatives, ranking among the poorest OECD members in efforts to combat climate change and showing weak involvement in international economic and social development. However, during the review period, significant changes occurred, particularly in aid for Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees.

## Key Challenges

The Czech Republic faces significant challenges in adapting its economic model, managing societal changes and attitudes, defining its place in the world, and repairing its political reputation. The country's international competitiveness has relied on multinational companies manufacturing for export to other EU member states while keeping high-skill activities, such as R&D and new product development, at home. However, increasing profit repatriation has dangerously widened the current account deficit. Additionally, the continuation of many traditional industries results in high levels of pollution and carbon emissions. This sustains a lobby with a vested interest in downplaying environmental damage and climate change.

To address these issues, the Czech Republic needs to emphasize less-polluting and higher-value economic activities. Current support for R&D is inadequate; the government's last program was weak, poorly resourced, and lacked sector-specific targeting. A strategy to promote innovation from domestically owned firms, rather than relying on lower-grade activities introduced by foreign firms, is essential.

A major barrier is the commitment to a low tax level relative to GDP. Budget deficits are kept in check with reasonable service provisions, thanks to the EU's financial help for public investment in education, research, and infrastructure. However, this support is not permanent. A critical challenge will be finding resources through additional taxation or cutting current services. The former appears feasible given the increase in company taxation in 2023, while the latter faces serious political barriers and risks breaching commitments to limit social exclusion.

A more welcoming approach to immigrants, both as a humanitarian policy and a means to combat the labor shortage, would require public resources. The assistance provided to Ukrainian refugees demonstrates that this is feasible, at least for some foreigners. An aging population pressures pensions and other public services. Gradually increasing the pension age seems sensible as a primary solution, provided adequate support is available for those less fit to work. Additional pressures include providing adequate housing for young people who cannot easily leave their parental homes. Attitudes toward family life are also contentious; relying on parental leave rather than state-supported child care for very young children hinders economic development by keeping

part of the potential labor force out of employment. There is a clear need to combat persistent attitudes regarding a woman's traditional role.

These internal challenges are linked to perceptions of Czechia's place in Europe. The EU has required changes in laws and the formulation of coherent programs and policies, accompanied by help from Structural Funds. However, the government is divided over the long-delayed issue of accession to the eurozone. Reluctance partly stems from insular attitudes within various parts of the political spectrum, linked to skepticism over other aspects of the EU agenda, such as concern over climate change.

Czechia's inward-looking stance is reflected in its limited interest in global issues, leaving it primarily a recipient of outside help rather than a donor. There is little appreciation of the benefits of becoming more active on the international stage. The country stands to gain from stronger measures against tax havens and requirements for reasonable levels of company taxation globally, both of which could bring substantial financial benefits.

While the majority welcomed Ukrainian refugees, the rise of identity politics is an important issue. Same-sex marriage is not codified in law, and new political divides are emerging over gender rights, domestic abuse, sexual abuse, and equal rights for the LGBTQ+ community. These issues also divide generations, with younger people, especially in cities, being more supportive of these causes. Conservatives dominate the current governing coalition. However, the younger generation might produce leaders who will seek modernization, economic restructuring, and the expansion of LGBTQ+ rights, possibly bundled with environmental protection.

# Democratic Government

## I. Vertical Accountability

### Elections

Free and Fair  
Political  
Competition  
Score: 9

Political competition is robust at both the national and subnational levels. Electoral registration procedures are fair and transparent. To establish a political party, three citizens aged 18 or over need to submit the new party's statutes to authorities, backed by 1,000 signatures. The 1991 law on political parties and movements established conditions to exclude parties that lack democratically elected organs or aim to remove the democratic foundations of the state, restrict the freedoms of other parties, or threaten morality and public order.

Ten major parties, coalitions, movements, and many independent candidates competed in the first round of Senate elections in September 2022. There were no conflicts over the registration of candidates.

Since 2012, the president of Czechia has been elected by citizens in a direct election. Any citizen with the right to vote who has reached 40 years of age is eligible to run for a maximum of two consecutive five-year terms. The candidate must gain at least 50,000 confirmed signatures from citizens, 10 signatures from senators, or 20 signatures from MPs. Twelve proposed candidates were rejected for failing to meet these criteria.

According to the OSCE, the 2023 presidential elections were free and fair. Their report stated, "All candidates were able to campaign freely, both offline and online, and fundamental freedoms were respected. The campaign was competitive but divisive, and voters could make an informed choice in both rounds, although in the second round, the campaign became more confrontational, negative and tense" (OSCE, 2023).

The presidential election in January 2023 ended in a run-off between former prime minister and leader of ANO (Akce nespokojených občanů, Action of Discontented Citizens), Andrej Babiš, and independent candidate, former General Petr Pavel. Eight candidates – seven men and one woman – competed in the first round. The two with the highest votes proceeded to the second round.

A funding ceiling was set at CZK 40 million, and the two leading candidates reached this limit. Pavel raised money mostly from various businesses, while Babiš was funded entirely by his own company, the conglomerate Agrofert. Candidates with less financial backing were at a disadvantage. The trade union leader Josef Středula eventually raised CZK 9.7 million, most of which was donated by a businessman and member of the right-wing ODS (Občanská demokratická strana, Civic Democratic Party), who believed there should be some representation for alternative views.

The media landscape enables candidates to freely voice their opinions. In the fall of 2023, Andrej Babiš sold his media consortium Mafra to an entrepreneur. Before this, he had been widely accused of using media he controlled to support his political campaigning and denigrate opponents. He had owned large dailies Mladá fronta dnes and Lidové noviny, as well as internet portals.

Free and Fair  
Elections  
Score: 9

All adult citizens, including convicted prisoners, can participate in national elections, and voter registration is relatively straightforward. EU citizens who are permanent residents of Czechia can participate in municipal and European elections. As of 2018, EU citizens who are temporary residents of Czechia can also participate in municipal elections. However, while there are special provisions for a mobile ballot box to facilitate voting for the disabled and seriously ill, there is no general ability to vote by mail. Czech citizens residing abroad can only vote at Czech embassies and consulates and must meet a specific deadline for registration. During the period under study, the pressure for a postal ballot – especially for citizens living abroad – has intensified and was included in the program statement of the Fiala government.

The Czech Republic has a dense system of voting locations with voting booths, where one location typically serves 1,000 people. Citizens have easy access to information on where and when to vote. Ballots are mailed to citizens' registered home addresses (domicile), and no voting registration is required, making voting easy and accessible (e15, 2023).

Citizens can use the courts to complain about irregularities, and 1,000 such complaints were raised in early 2023 regarding the presidential election.

However, 600 complaints were raised either too early or too late to be considered. Additionally, there were numerous duplicated complaints, indicating organized campaigns. Of the 400 complaints investigated, a number were upheld, identifying errors in counting when the number of ballot papers returned did not match the total number of votes recorded. Small corrections to the candidates' votes were subsequently made.

### Quality of Parties and Candidates

Socially Rooted  
Party System  
Score: 7

The party system in the Czech Republic allows for the aggregation of preferences from the grassroots level, and many small parties have emerged in the past. However, parties must cross a 5% threshold to gain entry into parliament. In the 2021 elections, which determine the current composition of parliament, many smaller parties failed to meet this threshold. For the first time since 1989, no left-wing party secured parliamentary seats. Consequently, more than one million votes, mostly from less well-off Czechs, are currently unrepresented in parliament (Guasti and Bušítková, CEPS, 2022).

Parties represent societal interests only to a limited degree. The connection between citizens and parties is weak and has become even more tenuous due to the rise of direct communication methods, flexible working arrangements that undermine union formation, and identity politics. Political parties generally lack extensive networks of local branches, though this varies among parties. The ODS, the party of Prime Minister Fiala, established in 1992, has eliminated local branches but maintains branches at the regional level.

The main opposition party, ANO, has no members and relies financially on its leader, Andrej Babiš, owner of the Agrofert conglomerate. Babiš has described ANO as both a catch-all party and a right-wing party with a social conscience, the latter description serving as a strategy to garner political support and undermine left-wing parties. In the European Parliament, ANO belongs to the ALDE group. It won 27.2% of the votes in the 2021 parliamentary elections.

The far-right Freedom and Direct Democracy party (Svoboda a přímá demokracie, SPD), which received 9.6% of the votes in 2021, is highly personalized and lacks a network of local branches. The Pirate Party, a member of the coalition government, has a very open structure and a plebiscitary decision-making process. It does not have institutionalized local branches and is a member of the Greens/European Free Alliance in the European Parliament. Although it appears socially liberal, it leans more to the right on economic issues. The Pirate Party is allied with STAN (Starostové a Nezávislí, Mayors and Independents), which is a member of the European



People's Party in the European Parliament. STAN is economically liberal and concerned with environmental issues. This alliance won 15.6% of the votes in 2021.

The main force in the government is a three-party coalition that received 27.8% of the votes in the 2021 parliamentary elections. Its largest member, the ODS, is socially conservative and economically liberal. It belongs to the European Conservatives and Reformists group in the European Parliament, along with Poland's PiS. The ODS retains a membership of 12,000, and the prime minister, Petr Fiala, is a member.

Effective Cross-Party Cooperation  
Score: 7

No current parliamentary party is formally opposed to parliamentary democracy. However, differences in style and policy make cooperation across all parties impossible. The SPD, with 9.6% of the vote in 2021, is often characterized as extreme right and allied with similar parties across Europe. The SPD campaigns against immigration, Islam, NATO, and the EU. Despite this, it cooperated with ANO in parliament from 2017 to 2021, and talks of further cooperation have continued. The biggest problem for ANO is the SPD's advocacy for referendums on leaving the EU and NATO.

The current coalition consists of five political entities that demonstrated their ability to cooperate by coming together in 2021 to oppose ANO. They successfully mobilized their supporters in coordinated efforts in the Senate and municipal elections in 2022. Although the current president, Petr Pavel, was an independent candidate, Andrej Babiš, the leader of ANO, tried to portray him as the leader of the governing parties and painted him as partisan. However, the ruling coalition is fragmented with disparate policy preferences, weakening it. Opinion polls show the ODS enjoying only one-third of the popular support of ANO.

Doubts over public support for the government as a whole could encourage smaller parties to oppose ODS policies in European Parliament elections and more clearly in parliamentary elections, as all parties will want to be confident of passing the 5% threshold. The five governing political entities have different views on European integration. Some support early affiliation with the eurozone, while the ODS has traditionally been opposed. Some are more concerned about environmental issues, while the ODS has traditionally been more skeptical.

On identity and cultural issues, the governing parties span both liberal and conservative views. Some support same-sex marriage and gender equality, while others oppose them. However, consensus and cooperation within the government around its adopted program appear possible on many issues,

particularly since many policy initiatives are initiated and partially funded by the EU.

### Access to Official Information

Transparent  
Government  
Score: 8

The Freedom of Information Act, passed in 2000 (106/1999), mandates that state, local administrative bodies, and public institutions provide citizens with information relevant to their functions. This information is either publicized online or is available through a request form. State institutions often implement the law unenthusiastically, but refusal to comply can lead to court action. In the past, some smaller municipalities faced significant financial penalties for failing to disclose requested information.

Over time, public bodies have learned what can and cannot be kept secret. Most ministries and larger public bodies now include a special section with information provided upon request. For example, Prague's city administration body for administering roads and communications received 71 information requests in 2023, seeking explanations for even detailed changes in traffic rules, such as the placement of road signals. It made these requests and responses public on a website, although it did not provide detailed information in cases it considered trivial.

The pandemic tested the government's ability to provide citizens and experts with access to information. Litigation by the investigative NGO Watchman (Hlidac státu) was required for the former government of Andrej Babiš to release relevant health statistics, especially on the availability of hospital beds and frontline personnel. Media and citizens utilized the law on freedom of access to information regarding PPE acquisition. The data revealed significant irregularities, clientelism, and corruption. Controversies on these issues have been relatively minor since then.

## II. Diagonal Accountability

### Media Freedom and Pluralism

Free Media  
Score: 9

The Czech Republic has long been characterized by a significant degree of media freedom, partly due to the independence of public media and the foreign ownership of private media. However, the private media market has changed significantly over the past decade. The most critical changes have been the

concentration of media ownership, the departure of several foreign media owners, and the expansion of media holdings to include print, online, radio, and television.

In recent years, print media readership has declined significantly, while online media has grown.

The MAFRA media group dominates the daily print media market, with an estimated 3.2 million readers. However, Prime Minister Babiš's ownership of MAFRA and other media outlets led to biased reporting and possible self-censorship among journalists.

In 2023, Babiš sold MAFRA, which owns two large dailies (Mladá Fronta Dnes and Lidové Noviny), to an investment group owned by billionaire Karel Pražák. This sale was effectively forced by the adoption of an amendment to existing conflict-of-interest laws in August 2023. Previously, Babiš had protected his media holdings by placing them under the control of a fund he claimed was independent. However, changes insisted on by the EU, despite Babiš's resistance, meant that as the ultimate beneficiary, he would still be judged the owner unless he could demonstrate otherwise. As an active politician, he could not own print media.

However, there is no equivalent restriction on a politician owning internet journals, which have more influence than print media.

The government does not censor media. Czech public TV is independent, overseen by an 18-member council chosen by parliament and intended to represent the country's political, cultural, and regional diversity. Its composition has broadly fulfilled this aim. Public TV invites speakers and experts who represent independent views. When politicians or their proxies are invited to debate on public or private TV channels, they are mostly faced with representatives from the opposition. Current media, both private and public, are free to criticize the government and face no repercussions.

The government remains slow and ineffective in mitigating the spread of disinformation. The military intelligence service asked internet providers to block pro-Russian sites, but this was only a request and could be circumvented, although visits to those sites did appear to decrease. Chain emails and Russian-related bots remain a critical issue, contributing to polarization and radicalization, particularly targeting seniors. For example, during the second round of the 2023 presidential elections, a hoax that presidential candidate and eventual winner Petr Pavel had died was spread.

Formal protection for whistleblowers was mandated by an EU directive and should have been incorporated into Czech law by December 2021, but it faced opposition from parties within the government. The impact of such protection could be substantial, as survey evidence suggests that one-fifth of Czech citizens observe some form of corrupt practice or illegal activity. The law, as finally introduced, would provide protection only if a criminal offense was being committed that could result in a fine of at least CZK 100,000. Both ANO, the main opposition party, and STAN, a coalition member party, favored strengthening the law, while other government parties were swayed by arguments that it would create problems for businesses.

Pluralism of  
Opinions  
Score: 9

The electoral law guarantees parties access to state radio and television, allocating a total of 14 hours for all parties to express their views, with equal time regardless of the party's size or previous electoral performance. However, these presentations are often tedious and unlikely to capture viewers' and listeners' attention. Municipalities also provide billboards, and political advertisements appear in newspapers. Despite these provisions, there is a notable coverage bias toward larger parties, driven by their greater resources and perceived importance.

Coverage by private media is less balanced than that of public media. While oversight mechanisms exist for public TV and radio, such mechanisms are largely absent for private media, especially online. Private media are not explicitly attached to any particular political party, with the exception of *Halo noviny*, a newspaper linked to the Communist Party, which became a weekly publication in April 2022 and does not provide circulation figures.

Online media are even less rigorously controlled than print media, with no legal restrictions on ownership by an active politician. However, the number of outlets is large and the views covered are quite diverse. These outlets provide circulation figures in the form of page views and returning users. The most successful are *novinky.cz* – linked to the left-leaning daily *Právo*, which reported 47,082 daily sales in 2022 – and *iDnes*, linked to the Mafra group. Both recorded daily views and regular users in the millions.

### Civil Society

Free Civil  
Society  
Score: 9

Freedoms of association and assembly are fully guaranteed in the Czech Republic. The law on political parties and movements regulates the formation and registration of all political entities. As of April – October 2020, over 147,257 autonomous, self-organized groups, associations, foundations, and organizations are registered in the country, although not all are active.

The influx of refugees from Ukraine mobilized civil society; volunteers worked around the clock at the main arrival points, such as the Prague train station and key border crossings, to help refugees. In addition, small groups and individuals offered free transit from the Slovak-Ukraine borders. In the first half of 2022, Czechs donated CZK 4 billion (€168 million) to humanitarian and military aid to Ukraine.

The Ukrainian community also mobilized to provide translation services. In response to the refugee, energy, and financial crises, several anti-government protests took place, especially in Prague. Some of these protests, organized by parties and organizations with no representation in parliament, threatened to turn violent.

The extent of the right to peaceful protest was tested during a demonstration related to the conflict in Gaza, highlighting both the authorities' power to declare protests illegal and the legal limits on their actions. Theologian and author Filip Outrata sought permission for a demonstration with the slogan "From the river to the sea Palestine will be free." The Ministry of the Interior warned that propagating the slogan could be a criminal offense, and the Prague city administration banned the demonstration. However, on December 17, 2023, the municipal court ruled that the ban itself was not legal. After hearing from academic experts on political extremism, the court accepted that the slogan was not inherently anti-Semitic or a call to genocide. It was not solely used by Hamas and had different possible interpretations depending on the context.

Effective Civil  
Society  
Organizations  
(Capital and  
Labor)  
Score: 8

In the Council for Economic and Social Accord, trade unions and employer associations actively comment on bills pertaining to social and economic issues during tripartite meetings with the government. The consultation process has become more transparent due to the electronic publication of legislative norms and regulations. Notably, major employers and trade unions possess substantial resources and expertise, enabling them to formulate coherent policies.

Trade unions and employers' organizations often have differing aims and opinions on various issues. However, they are united in their support for this means of communication and issue joint statements when they feel ignored by the government, as seen in the early preparations for the government's so-called consolidation package (discussed under Sustainable Budgeting Policies).

The main employers' organization, the Union of Industry and Transport of the Czech Republic (Svaz průmyslu a dopravy České republiky, SPČR), has

emphasized its opposition to higher business taxes and increased taxes on energy, claiming these harm the metallurgy and mineralogy industries. This organization consistently expresses opinions on current economic policy issues and lobbies the government and politicians both through and independently of the tripartite structures. It has persistently argued for government help in relaxing rules to allow the recruitment of more workers from abroad. This, along with many of its other demands, has not been a priority for trade unions.

For trade unions, the central issues have been the protection of living standards and public sector pay levels. To press these issues, the main trade union center, the Czech and Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions (Českomoravská konfederace odborových svazů, ČMKOS), organized a day of protest on November 27, 2023, including a one-hour token work stoppage at some workplaces. This protest was linked with demonstrations by employees in education against the perceived threat of pay cuts. While this action has not led to immediate changes in government policy, there may be a long-term impact on a government with internal divisions and a stated commitment to improving the education system.

Effective Civil  
Society  
Organizations  
(Social Welfare)  
Score: 6

The best-organized section of the population concerned with welfare provision is pensioners. A large number of distinct organizations have individual members. Their activities span recreation, sport, welfare, and advisory services, and many also raise clearly political demands. The Rada seniorů České republiky (Council of Seniors of the Czech Republic, RSČR) brings together 17 all-state organizations, 16 regional organizations, 24 municipal organizations, and many more local pensioners' clubs.

The council is represented, albeit in small numbers, in the advisory council on seniors and the aging population organized under the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, and one of its leading representatives also became an advisor to the relevant minister in 2022. The RSČR has presented clear and coherent political demands, most comprehensively prior to the last parliamentary elections in 2021. These demands include a call for pension reform to raise the share of pensions in GDP, restore the level of pensions relative to the average wage (which has declined markedly since 1989), reduce the required number of years to qualify for a full pension from 35 to 25, and ensure adequate provision for seniors in terms of health, housing, and other social services. This approach clearly differs from the direction taken by the Fiala government, as discussed in subsequent sections.

The RSČR's latest report on political activity referred positively to its warm and easy contacts with Babiš when he had been prime minister and praised his government for raising the pension level. Relations with ministers in the Fiala

government have also been described as correct, and the organization claimed in its report on activities in 2022 to have brought about several changes to proposed legislation. Nevertheless, these organizations probably have considerable political influence due to their ability to mobilize a substantial number of voters, likely to be dissatisfied with the Fiala government.

During the review period, a major controversy in the social welfare domain centered on same-sex marriage and adoption, with civil society organizations actively driving the agenda. Both proponents (We are Fair) and opponents (Alliance for Family) demonstrated significant organizational strength, including financial resources, policy experts, and media campaigns. Access to government and ministerial levels favored the Alliance for Family due to the Christian Democrats' control of the social welfare portfolio. Despite greater public support for the legislation and backing from civil society organizations, including multinational corporations that addressed an open letter to the prime minister, opponents successfully delayed and currently prevent the adoption of the legislation. The introduction of last-minute surrogacy regulations further divided the proponents. While ministers from STAN and the Pirates openly supported same-sex marriage, the overall parliamentary votes, combined with the prime minister's silence and the stance of the ODS and Christian Democrats, suggest opposition rather than ambivalence.

Effective Civil  
Society  
Organizations  
(Environment)  
Score: 5

Environmental groups have historically exerted limited influence on national-level environmental policy due to restricted institutional channels to the government, sporadic access to parliamentarians, and evolving consultation processes at the ministerial level. Nevertheless, they are represented in some government advisory committees.

The Green Circle serves as an illustrative example, dedicated to monitoring laws and policies and coordinating legislative campaigns. On the transnational level, the Rainbow Movement (Hnutí Duha) is part of the EU umbrella organization Friends of the Earth. It has 42 permanent employees and an annual budget of CZK 21 million; half of this funding comes from 6,089 individual donors, a quarter from foreign foundations, and a very small amount from Czech state organs. It claims as its main success for 2023 the parliamentary discussion of a law on community energy.

Environmental groups have some influence, particularly when supporting the application of EU directives and raising public awareness on specific issues, such as the poisoning of the Bečva river, referenced under Effective Legislative Interventions.

### III. Horizontal Accountability

#### Independent Supervisory Bodies

Effective Public  
Auditing  
Score: 9

The Supreme Audit Office (Nejvyšší kontrolní úřad, NKÚ) was established in 1993 (law 166/1993) as an independent audit institution. It oversees public spending and budgeting, evaluating the effectiveness, economy, and efficiency of public resource utilization and identifying weaknesses in their expenditure.

The NKÚ provides independent and impartial reports to the government, the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate, experts, and the public. These reports assess whether national resources have been used effectively, economically, and efficiently, and whether all binding legal regulations have been observed. NKÚ officers face no term limits but must retire at age 65. The president of the Czech Republic nominates the leadership, and all nominations are confirmed by the parliament. On average, the NKÚ audits CZK 230 billion per year, completing 33 control actions in 2022, investigating 167 individuals, and making 19 recommendations.

The NKÚ's annual report for 2022 emphasized the need for substantial changes to achieve sustainable budgets. This commentary mirrored the government's analysis justifying its 2023 package of measures and was implicitly controversial both politically and economically, as discussed under Sustainable Budget Policies.

The report also conducted several investigations into individual government expenditures, uncovering various weaknesses and irregularities. For example, goals for digitalization had not been met and relied heavily on one-off funding from the EU, raising concerns about the lack of guaranteed long-term funding. The use of EU funds during 2016-2017 (the most recent period investigated) was often improperly planned and controlled. Allocations frequently did not follow stated rules, despite contemporary reports suggesting compliance. In practice, allocated sums were often higher than those specified in the bidding process, with inadequate recording of spending and evaluation of impacts. Moreover, assistance intended for smaller enterprises frequently benefited large firms.

While effective auditing is in place, it remains up to public bodies to address the issues raised by the audit office. Past experience shows that media attention is sometimes drawn to these findings.



Effective Data  
Protection  
Score: 9

The Office for the Protection of Personal Data (Úřad pro ochranu osobních údajů, ÚOOÚ) was first established in June 2000. Its chair is chosen by the Senate and confirmed by the president, ensuring independence from the government of the day. The EU Global Data Protection Directive of May 25, 2018, was enshrined in the Personal Data Processing Act 2019 (110/2019). This act implements the EU's new legal framework, with the ÚOOÚ responsible for its implementation. The ÚOOÚ also handles data processing that does not fall within EU law, such as immigration-related matters. It sets out requirements for processing personal data for criminal law enforcement purposes and some aspects of national security. The intelligence services are required to comply with internationally recognized data protection standards.

The ÚOOÚ has a role in electronic communications and regulates bulk commercial communication and advertising. It supervises compliance with any unsolicited advertising disseminated via electronic means and is involved in cooperation between national authorities responsible for enforcing consumer protection laws.

The new law mandates a range of new activities, and difficulties in recruiting qualified specialists have been identified as factors limiting its effectiveness. The annual report for 2022 indicates that 1,528 complaints and 664 suggestions were handled. The primary complaints involved using data for marketing purposes, making personal details public, and camera monitoring. Nearly all complaints were resolved through communication with the concerned parties, with very few advancing further. Thirty fines were issued for passing on commercial information, resulting in a total revenue of CZK 948,000. A few cases were referred to the courts. For example, a CZK 40,000 fine against a hospital for handling electronic health documentation was upheld by the court.

Data protection issues are covered by the media on a regular basis, and the ÚOOÚ frequently comments on legislation, including that regarding personal identity cards. These cards display an identification number that includes the date of birth and sex, which is necessary for various purposes such as opening a bank account. The ÚOOÚ argued that this information should not be on a document from which it could be easily copied. However, private businesses have complained about the cost of transitioning to a different numbering system.

Effective Judicial  
Oversight  
Score: 9

### Rule of Law

Czechia has a clear separation of powers with robust checks and balances. The judiciary is independent, free from unconstitutional interference by other institutions, and mostly free from corruption. When corruption in the judiciary is identified, it is rigorously prosecuted. The Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court, and the Supreme Administrative Court are appointed by the Senate – the second chamber of the parliament – following proposals from the president. The judicial appointment process is transparent and adequately covered by public media. Moreover, the involvement of the president and the Senate increases the likelihood that the political views of judges are diverse.

In November 2022, then-President Zeman announced his intent to appoint the new president of the Constitutional Court before the end of his term in March 2023. However, the term of the sitting president of the Constitutional Court was not due to end until August 2023. Legal experts, the government, and the majority of the Constitutional Court opposed this step, as did the later president-elect, Petr Pavel, during electoral debates. The possibility of the Constitutional Court's paralysis and the standoff between the Senate and the president increased the stakes of the 2023 presidential election. The new president, Petr Pavel, pledged to stay within the constitution's remit and will have to appoint 11 Constitutional Court judges during the first 18 months of the court. During his campaign, Petr Pavel named widely respected judges and constitutional law experts as his picks, and his choices were approved by the Senate.

Decisions made by the Constitutional Court have primarily pertained to judgments by other courts, although 50 cases in 2022 concerned laws. Issues often take a long time to reach the Constitutional Court; it was still handling the case involving Petr Nečas, prime minister in 2012, whose partner and later wife used the intelligence service to follow his former wife. The court concluded that the intelligence service can only operate as stipulated by law, not on orders from a state official.

The court also addressed constitutional issues related to emergency measures during the COVID-19 pandemic, determining that the laws adopted were largely acceptable given the need to protect public health, especially as public control and scrutiny were always possible. In some cases, directives by local administrations during the COVID-19 era were found to conflict with the Charter of Human Rights, which is incorporated into the Czech constitution.

Universal Civil  
Rights  
Score: 7

The government and administration respect and protect citizens' basic civil rights. However, complaints lodged with the European Court of Human Rights and the Office of the Public Defender of Rights (Ombudsman) indicate concerns about lengthy legal proceedings. The protection of crime victims, especially children who often experience secondary victimization during investigations and prosecutions, remains a significant issue. Additionally, standards of psychiatric care are notably below EU levels.

The Czech legal system guarantees equal access to work, education, and social services, with no official discrimination based on gender, race, religion, or social origin. However, discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity persists, often manifesting as bias or social norms. A large part of the political spectrum has shown little concern for countering negative or discriminatory attitudes. A significant gender pay gap results in lower pensions and a higher risk of poverty for women. Half of the Roma population lives in social exclusion, and societal perception of the Roma remains strongly negative. Increased electoral participation in Roma-dominated districts during the 2023 presidential elections led to unfounded and unproven accusations of vote buying.

A major case before the Constitutional Court in 2022 concerned the rights of transgender individuals to legally change their sex without undergoing gender reassignment surgery. The court denied the request of a trans citizen, although two Constitutional Court judges filed dissenting opinions.

Effective  
Corruption  
Prevention  
Score: 6

Corruption and clientelism are widespread. All governments pledge to fight corruption, but none have adequately addressed the issue. There are no public statistics on the number of successfully prosecuted public officials. Problems with politicians have started from the very top. Former Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, leader of the opposition ANO party, built his business empire, the Agrofert conglomerate, with initial funding from unclear sources; his activities have frequently provoked controversy. The largest concern involves the use of EU funds to finance a business temporarily separated from his main business and quietly put under the ownership of family members. It was returned to his control after receiving the subsidy. In January 2023 a court dismissed the case against Babiš and criticized the prosecution's work.

In the fall of 2022, French prosecutors opened a case against Andrej Babiš for money laundering connected to the purchase of real estate in Southern France, which came to light in the Panama Papers. The EU has continued to regard the "blind trust" in which Agrofert Holding was placed as unsatisfactory for Babiš's claim to avoid conflicts of interest, as he has always been the clear beneficiary of his firms' activities. The use of EU subsidies, which depend on

Czech government decisions, therefore remains problematic. The government has so far made no steps toward requesting the return of any subsidies from Agrofert.

The current government parties used Babiš's alleged corruption to campaign against him. However, they were slow to introduce promised changes to the law on conflict of interests. Although they complained of ANO's obstruction of the parliamentary process, with a clear parliamentary majority they could have overruled this.

The legal amendments, as finally passed, ensured that an owner of a firm could not escape accusations of conflict of interest by claiming to have transferred control to a trust. This forced Babiš to sell his print media empire, but he could still own online media. Another loophole, supported also by the ODS and two other government parties, would still allow a firm owned by a minister to bid for public contracts.

The rules for party and campaign financing and their enforcement are a contested political issue. In April 2015, the Ministry of Interior submitted an amendment to the law on political parties to parliament. The proposal was based on the Group of States against Corruption of the Council of Europe (GRECO) recommendations to Czechia issued in 2011 and came into force in January 2017. The law introduced financial limits for party financing and electoral campaigns, the mandatory establishment of transparent accounts, and greater revenue regulation of political parties and movements.

The first scandal for the Fiala government, elected in 2021, revolved around campaign financing. The STAN party accepted donations from an anonymous account in Cyprus. During the January 2022 parliamentary debate, the chairman of STAN and the minister of interior expressed a commitment to return any irregular donation.

The Office for the Oversight of the Political Parties and Political Movements (Úřad pro dohled nad hospodařením politických stran a politických hnutí, ÚHHPSH) reported that one-third of political parties did not submit their 2022 annual financial reports. This noncompliance violates the law, and the office noted that it represents a 25% increase in noncompliance. However, all 37 parties, movements, and political subjects eligible for state subsidies complied with the law.

## Legislature

Sufficient  
Legislative  
Resources  
Score: 9

The parliament has resources to conduct its legislative work. The Office of the Chamber provides professional administrative and technical support for the deputies. Additionally, legislators have access to a parliamentary library. Legislation is prepared in parliamentary committees; currently, there are 18 committees. The parliament can also establish ad hoc and investigative committees. All parties and movements form political clubs.

Effective  
Legislative  
Oversight  
Score: 8

As specified in the rules of procedure of the Chamber of Deputies, Czech parliamentary committees may request nearly all government documents and information from government members, heads of administrative authorities, and local authority bodies necessary for performing their functions.

These requests are usually respected, and documents are delivered on time. Ministers and the top personnel of major state institutions are obliged to attend committee meetings and answer questions when asked. According to the rules, ministers are also required to present draft bills to appropriate committees. If the ministers send officials below the rank of deputy minister, committees may – and often do – refuse to discuss a legislative proposal.

Effective  
Legislative  
Investigations  
Score: 6

The opposition can initiate investigations. Forty MPs are needed to propose a new investigative commission, the formation of which is then voted on in the full parliament. Twenty-three commissions were established from 1993 to 2021, but none since then. These commissions usually relate to long-running scandals, such as privatization cases in the 1990s and the allocation of procurement contracts since then.

The nature of Czech politics – with multiple parties represented in parliament and coalition governments that are not fully united – has meant that issues potentially embarrassing to government ministers can be subjects of investigation. A notable case continuing into the review period involved pollution of the Bečva River in Moravia. The worst incident occurred on September 20, 2020, when cyanide was released into the river, leading to the death of 40 metric tons of fish along 40 km of the river. There was suspicion that the issue was not being properly investigated, while a highly plausible culprit, a firm owned by Babiš, was not at the center of investigations.

The parliamentary commission was not aimed at finding the guilty party but rather at determining whether public agencies had conducted the investigation properly. It concluded that the investigation was not handled correctly. A final court decision on January 30, 2023, blamed a different firm but found no criminal offense. Several expert witnesses to the commission publicly

expressed their astonishment at the verdict and the apparent lack of police investigation into other possibilities. Thus, in this case, the parliamentary commission could highlight the possibility of serious irregularities but could not influence or overrule a court's decision.

Legislative  
Capacity for  
Guiding Policy  
Score: 8

Major legislative committees align with ministerial portfolios. Opposition parties can hold and often do obtain the chairmanship of parliamentary committees, albeit not the most important ones. Draft legislation can undergo changes after deliberations in committees. The Rules of Procedure of the Chamber of Deputies do not prescribe a

The text edits are as follows:

The chamber is obliged to establish the Mandate and Immunity Committee, the Committee on Petitions, the Budget Committee, the Control Committee, and the Organizing Committee.

Committee, the Electoral Committee, and the Committee on European Affairs. However, the establishment of additional committees is within its competence. Committee meetings are public, except for Organizing Committee meetings and Mandate and Immunity Committee meetings. In the 2021 – 2025 term, there were 18 parliamentary committees, 15 of which shadowed government ministries or ministerial agendas. However, there was no exact match between the task areas of parliamentary committees and ministries. For example, the The Economic Committee covered the agendas of two ministries: the Ministry of Industry and Trade and the Ministry of Transportation. Parliamentary committees can and frequently do establish subcommittees.

# Governing with Foresight

## I. Coordination

### Quality of Horizontal Coordination

Effective  
Coordination  
Mechanisms of  
the GO/PMO  
Score: 8

The Office of the Government of the Czech Republic (GO) is a central body of state administration that performs tasks related to the professional, organizational, and technical support of government activities. It provides support for government meetings by preparing programs and documents. Additionally, it assists the expert bodies of the prime minister and members of the government who do not have their own departments, as well as 19 advisory and working bodies of the government. These bodies include representatives from ministries and external organizations, creating a framework for coordination in preparing legislation and long-term plans across government departments and with the prime minister.

An additional 14 committees fall under individual ministries but have similarly broad compositions. They cover a wide range of areas such as state security policy, human rights, economic policy, the Roma minority, relations with the EU, sustainable development, and energy strategy.

The Government Office's role in strategic planning and coordination across the government was weakened by the abolition – and continued absence – of a strategic planning team. In 2023, a Government Analytical Unit was established to restore and strengthen the office's capacity to coordinate policies and strategies.

Effective  
Coordination  
Mechanisms  
within the  
Ministerial  
Bureaucracy  
Score: 7

The government's legislative plan divides tasks among ministries and other central bodies of the state administration, setting deadlines for submitting bills to the cabinet. Task allocation is transparent. Some horizontal coordination among line-ministry civil servants occurs. Senior ministry officials play a crucial role in collecting and discussing comments on proposed legislation. However, barriers persist among the ministries, particularly between line

ministries controlled by different political parties. The decision-making process also involves various interministerial groups or councils formally established under a specific ministry, in which various other ministries are represented. These groups may submit material during the preparatory process for government meetings and participate in the interministerial comment procedure. The councils provide advice prior to decision-making on various topics, but their powers are limited to making recommendations. For example, the Council on Sustainable Development, under the Ministry of the Environment, has 42 members, including representatives of the Government Office, 15 ministries, and outside interests such as NGOs, trade unions, employers' organizations, and various individual experts.

Complementary  
Informal  
Coordination  
Score: 6

The coalition agreement of the Fiala government, which consists of five parties, includes fixed principles of coalition cooperation and coordination. The most crucial body for policy coordination is the coalition council. It consists of the coalition parties' chairpersons and up to three other representatives from each coalition party. Another body that meets more frequently is the so-called K-five, which includes the chairs of the government parties. Additionally, coalition parties have expert commissions. The expert commissions of the individual coalition parties primarily communicate among themselves in preparing legislative proposals.

There is also informal interministerial cooperation in the form of various joint projects. Informal coordination is also possible through government working and advisory bodies in which different ministries are represented.

### Quality of Vertical Coordination

Effectively  
Setting and  
Monitoring  
National  
(Minimum)  
Standards  
Score: 8

The creation of standards for the performance of public administration agencies is the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior. The strategic document "Client-oriented Public Administration 2030" concept, adopted in 2020 (Mugglin et al. 2022: 21), contains more than 70 concrete measures aimed at bringing public administration closer to the citizens. There is a system of measurement and evaluation of public administration to assess the services provided, approved by the government resolution of July 2020. Public Service Standards are also in place for the ministries that provide these services, including performance evaluation criteria. A system of sanctions is not mentioned in them.

The accessibility of public services and infrastructure is primarily addressed in relation to the quality of life in individual regions. There is a standardization of the spatial availability of public services, which responds to current needs and



represents a specific social obligation to provide a given service at a particular geographical level.

Comprehensive and rigorous standards have been developed for evaluating all levels of education. The key organization is the inspectorate, subordinated to the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport. The latest set of evaluation criteria was published in June 2022, specifying a four-point scale, from excellent to inadequate. Judgments are made across six areas, with three to five specific questions within each, making possible an overall judgment of the area. Evaluations are conducted by inspectors visiting establishments either following specific complaints or as part of routine inspections. Visits are frequent, with 20,349 reported to the 4,200 basic schools in the 2022 – 2023 school year, including 1,021 full inspections. Judgments of inadequate were rare and mostly related to the state of buildings.

Effective  
Multilevel  
Cooperation  
Score: 7

The Competency Law regulates the powers and competencies of ministries and central government bodies. Czechia has gradually introduced a “joint model” of public administration, allowing local self-government units to exercise both independent and delegated powers transferred from the central state administration. This has resulted in a largely decentralized administrative model where regions and municipalities manage their own competencies and delegate state administration tasks (Mugglin et al. 2022: 21). However, there are no indicators to further assess and monitor differences in service delivery at regional and municipal levels (Obinger 2023: 795).

Formal structures for consultation between different levels of government exist through councils attached to the Government Office or individual ministries. These councils include representatives from various levels of government and outside interests. For instance, the Council for Public Administration, chaired by the Minister of the Interior, includes 28 members from various ministries, central bodies, and lower levels of public administration. Coordination between government levels is essential to ensure financing and co-financing of projects under EU programs and to facilitate consultation on strategic themes. In 2022, the council held four meetings discussing the modernization of public administration, administrative efficiency, human resources policy, and e-Government. Previous discussions have included building regulations, pay relations between central and regional government, and election methods at lower government levels.

In 2020–2021, the Secretariat of the Government Council for Non-Governmental Nonprofit Organizations worked on developing a strategy to enhance cooperation between public administration and non-public entities, particularly the nonprofit sector. This strategy aims to make nonprofit entities

stable and crucial partners of public administration in addressing Czech society's needs. Subsequent discussions have focused on criteria for financial support for NGOs.

## II. Consensus-Building

### Recourse to Scientific Knowledge

Harnessing  
Scientific  
Knowledge  
Effectively  
Score: 6

The government does not have a strong record of systematically involving scientific expertise, except perhaps in science policy. However, some experts participate in committees and subcommittees at the government and ministerial levels. A commission was created in June 2019 to prepare material for the government on climate adaptation and mitigation, but it did not meet during the pandemic, and its last report was produced in 2021. The commission includes independent experts, including those from NGOs, and some of these experts publish their views independently.

An example of innovative practice from the scientific community is AVex. This series of explanations addresses scientific issues, each approximately six pages long, and is prepared by institutes of the Academy of Sciences. Since 2019, there have been three publications each year that tackle potentially controversial topics in a forthright manner. For instance, one publication explains global warming rigorously but in an accessible way for the general public. Another addresses migration, providing a historical account that argues permanent immigration is inevitable. It also discusses ways to counter myths and racial and religious stereotypes, as well as how to improve the lives of immigrants. Despite these efforts, the publications have not yet visibly altered the opinions of state organs and members of parliament, the intended target audience.

### Involvement of Civil Society in Policy Development

Effective  
Involvement of  
Civil Society  
Organizations  
(Capital and  
Labor)  
Score: 8

The Council of Economic and Social Accord (Rada hospodářské a sociální dohody, RHSD) is the institutional mechanism for involving employers' and employees' representatives (trade unions) in negotiations with the government on significant economic and social development issues. Established in 1990, the RHSD operates under Rules of Procedure that determine the regularity of meetings. In addition to plenary sessions and the Bureau, specialized working

groups also convene. The frequency of these meetings depends on the government's attitude toward social dialogue during its term.

During the review period, the RHSD held regular plenary sessions, with meeting minutes and subsequent press conferences publicly available on the government website. In 2022, six regular sessions were held, along with one extraordinary session addressing the situation in Ukraine and its impact on the Czech Republic. In 2023, six sessions were also held. Additionally, tripartite meetings occurred at the ministry level to address specific sectoral issues, such as education and health. Tripartite meetings at the regional level also took place.

All three partners consider tripartite meetings crucial, but satisfaction with the results varies depending on how well views and demands are balanced. Examples include negotiations on minimum wage increases, guaranteed wage increases, and the so-called consolidation package. In the latter case, the government was unwilling to compromise.

Effective  
Involvement of  
Civil Society  
Organizations  
(Social Welfare)  
Score: 7

The policymaking process in Czechia is relatively open, with a broad spectrum of social and economic actors consulted during the legislative process. Representatives from the nonprofit sector and civil society are members of several government advisory bodies. However, these often allow only formal consultations, with material submitted late and comments frequently ignored.

In July 2021, the Czech government approved the Strategy for Cooperation between Public Administration and Nonprofit Organizations (NGOs) for 2021–2030, formulating objectives and setting tasks concerning the nonprofit sector. The strategy's implementation is regularly evaluated through monitoring reports. According to the 2022 report, two-thirds of the measures have been only partially implemented.

NGO work has significantly influenced life in the Czech Republic. In 2023, thanks to NGO activity, a redefinition of rape was incorporated into legislation. In the field of social welfare, NGOs pressured the government to increase subsidies for personal assistants for disabled citizens. Additionally, pensioners' organizations are actively involved in policy formulation, as discussed in a previous section.

Patients' organizations also play a crucial role, assisting patients with serious illnesses and communicating with government officials to help patients secure their rights.

Effective  
Involvement of  
Civil Society  
Organizations  
(Environment)  
Score: 6

In 2023, thanks to pressure from NGOs such as the DUHA Movement, an amendment to the Energy Act was approved, introducing community energy. Environmental NGOs are integrated into formal policymaking structures through membership in the Council for Sustainable Development under the Ministry of the Environment and various subcommittees. The council includes a representative from the Green Circle, a coordinating body of environmental organizations that comments on and seeks to influence national and EU legislation. One of the Green Circle's recent concerns involves plans to build high-speed train lines, which the government began discussing in 2017 and prioritized in March 2023. The Green Circle argues that alternatives might be more effective for achieving the goal of decarbonizing transport.

The DUHA Movement prides itself on its independence from the government as it monitors legislation. Its judgment on the Fiala government's first two years was mixed, welcoming proposals to reduce carbon dependence while arguing for more support for renewable energy and less reliance on nuclear energy, for which costs were judged to have been underestimated. Its relatively sympathetic assessment of the government reflects the latter's adherence to EU rules and the sympathies of the relevant minister within the coalition government.

A further controversy involving environmental organizations related to a proposed change to planning rules aimed at speeding up the approval of infrastructure projects. Adapted from EU law, this change responded to complaints in Czechia that environmental organizations were delaying approvals – particularly for motorway construction – by raising individual complaints at multiple stages of a project, sometimes for up to 20 years. The proposed changes would require a decision on building permits within four years and limit objections on environmental grounds. The law was approved on November 3, 2023. However, crucial changes were incorporated a few weeks beforehand without allowing space for public discussion. It remains to be seen whether environmental organizations and others will complain to the Constitutional Court, as they have threatened.

### Openness of Government

Open  
Government  
Score: 7

The OECD OURdata Index on Open Government Data for the Czech Republic is slightly above the OECD average (2019). However, closer examination reveals gaps in government support for data reuse and some uncertainty regarding data protection rules. The Digital and Information Agency (DIA), established in April 2023, coordinates and supports the digitalization of the public sector. DIA is working to develop relevant standards in collaboration with data holders and will provide expert support.

There are several data catalogues in Czechia, including: (1) The National Open Data Catalogue, which features an interface with navigation via search, publisher, and tags; (2) the Czech Statistical Office (CZSO) Catalogue, which allows users to navigate data products based on type, date of release, theme, spatial and temporal granularity, and other criteria. The CZSO provides rapid information on economic developments, allowing comparisons with data from other countries. As an independent source from the government, its data are widely used across public media, along with reports and forecasts from the central bank and government ministries; and (3) the Czech Social Science Data Archive, which offers a research data catalogue.

### III. Sensemaking

#### Preparedness

Capacity for  
Strategic  
Foresight and  
Anticipatory  
Innovation  
Score: 6

In June 2022, the Ministry of the Interior published an analysis assessing the potential of the Czech public administration to foster and support innovation. This analysis followed an OECD declaration on May 22, 2019, regarding innovation in the public sector. The declaration included examples from various countries, highlighting good practices. The study is part of implementing the Concept of Client-Oriented Public Administration by 2030, which the government approved in 2020 with EU funding support. The concept aims to enhance the client orientation of public administration by achieving five (notable but potentially ambiguous) strategic goals:

Accessible and quality public administration services

An efficient public administration system

Effective public administration institutions

Competent human resources

An informed and participating citizenry (Mugglin et al. 2022: 21)

The Ministry of the Interior regularly analyzes innovations in public administration. An OECD evaluation of progress was generally positive but noted that more work is needed. It found that participation in policymaking was weak, rarely extending beyond prominent individuals. The evaluation recommended experimenting with ways to involve citizens more broadly, such as a central interactive portal.

The evaluations indicate that Czech public administration lacks a systematic approach to innovation. Innovations are developed sporadically, primarily depending on political priorities. Employees are generally not motivated to propose new ideas and ways of working, limiting the emergence of innovations. However, the situation varies across different segments of public administration.

The annual report on public administration for 2022 noted that half of the central organs had implemented some form of innovation, a higher figure than in previous years, although data only go back to 2020. It remains unclear what qualifies as an innovation and whether many of those recorded had a significant impact.

### Analytical Competence

Effective  
Regulatory  
Impact  
Assessment  
Score: 7

According to government legislative rules and partly based on the implementation of EU law, regulatory impact assessments (RIA) are applied in principle to all generally binding regulations prepared by ministries and other central administrative authorities. A standard RIA methodology, refined over time, guides this process. Ministries submit RIA reports to the RIA unit at the Office of the Government for formal review, followed by more extensive scrutiny by the independent RIA board. RIA commission members also participate in discussions on selected regulatory drafts during Legislative Council of the Government meetings. The RIA unit provides methodological guidance and organizes workshops and seminars for civil servants who prepare impact assessments. Internationally, the RIA Commission participates in the activities of the RegWatchEurope platform.

In practice, much government legislation is exempt from RIA assessment if it does not change regulations or is not proposed by the government. In 2022, 32 out of 108 draft laws were investigated, with 18 proposed laws and two government decrees subjected to a full assessment. Fourteen of these laws were approved, often with many criticisms and suggestions for improvement. In six cases, the verdict was that the draft should be dropped. There is no comprehensive report on subsequent actions following criticisms or proposals to drop a draft. However, past practice shows little significant change to legislation that is finally passed.

In January 2023, the government approved draft amendments to the government legislative rules, the General Principles for Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA), and the Government Rules of Procedure. The revisions

mainly concern Family Impact Assessment, Territorial Impact Assessment, and Digital Impact Assessment. The changes for family impact place greater emphasis on this area, requiring a separate box to be filled in and an assessment of impacts on different kinds of families and children's rights. The territorial theme involves identifying specific impacts on specific regions and determining whether a new regulation conflicts with regional strategies for sustainability, including climate change policies and air pollution goals, as referenced in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. These additions should be treated with equal weight to any other item in an RIA. The changes took effect on February 1, 2023, and were implemented after March 31, 2023. The RIA Commission met eight times in both 2022 and 2023. In the government's legislative plan for 2024, 48% of items indicated an obligation to carry out an RIA.

Effective  
Sustainability  
Checks  
Score: 6

Sustainability checks are an integral part of every RIA, but they are not very comprehensive (Cvachovcová and Polášek 2020). The checklist requires a response to the question of whether there are effects on social, economic and Environmental issues and the impacts they have are indicated through a set of 2016 amendments to the RIA guidelines, which specified how to assess or quantify these effects. Relevant ministries refine these criteria on an ongoing basis. Changes made in 2023, referred to as Effective Regulatory Impact Assessment, strengthened sustainability checks.

Effective Ex Post  
Evaluation  
Score: 5

Evaluations of the effectiveness and efficiency of existing regulations are usually ad hoc and rarely used. Evaluations of the effects of regulatory changes have not been part of the RIA process but can be carried out by individual departments. However, this has only been done systematically for the use of EU funds, and even then with shortcomings, as revealed by an NKÚ investigation covered under Effective Public Auditing. There is a need to increase analytical capacity, strengthen data sharing across government, more rigorously assess the impact of regulation RIA, and improve the ex post evaluation of public policy documents and legislation. Several ministries and agencies have started to address these gaps. In June 2023, the government approved the so-called "Ex Post RIA" to complete the existing RIA system. This has yet to show any results. From 2025, the review of the effectiveness of legislation in Czechia should have a new, uniform format.

# Sustainable Policymaking

## I. Economic Sustainability

### Circular Economy

Circular  
Economy Policy  
Efforts and  
Commitment  
Score: 7

Czechia has the second-highest share of industrial output in its gross value added (GVA) among EU member states. The steel, metal, automotive, petrochemical, and construction sectors contribute significantly. The material footprint per capita – a measure of raw material use in final consumption – score (6.47) is higher than the OECD average (5.55), reflecting the weight of basic industries in the economy.

Following the EU action plan on the circular economy adopted in March 2020, the country has developed a national circular economy strategy, roadmap, and action plan. In December 2021, the government adopted the document “Strategic Framework of the Circular Economy of the Czech Republic 2040,” abbreviated as Circular Czech Republic 2040. To implement this long-term strategy, the Circular Czech Republic 2022 – 2027 Action Plan was adopted, which sets ten strategic objectives: Products and Design; Industry, Raw Materials, Construction, Energy; Bio-economy and Food; Consumption and Consumer; Waste Management; Water; Research, Development and Innovation; Education and Knowledge; Economic Resources; and Circular Cities and Infrastructure.

On some of these topics, there were indications of specific government policies that could be adopted, while others remained vague. For example, firms using secondary materials where possible were to be favored for government contracts, waste composting was to be supported, means to give a second life to products were to be encouraged, and financial resources from the EU were to be used to support infrastructure in circular cities.

The Ministry of the Environment is the strategy coordinator. The implementation of the objectives involves the Ministry of the Environment,



the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Local Development.

Waste management is central to the circular economy. The recycling score in Czechia is higher than the OECD average (6.1). However, more support is needed to develop recycling technologies and invest in new methods for recycling waste and individual components of municipal waste. An example is plastic waste collection, which is high in Czechia. Still, the main obstacles remain the high landfilling rate, the weak recycling infrastructure, and the long-discussed but yet-to-be-implemented deposit return system for PET bottles.

### Viable Critical Infrastructure

Policy Efforts  
and Commitment  
to a Resilient  
Critical  
Infrastructure  
Score: 7

The Czech Republic ranks 28th in the OECD in terms of critical infrastructure, but there is gradual, albeit slow, improvement. Its infrastructure development remains hesitant, with investment heavily dependent on EU support.

The Czech Republic has a dense rail network, with more than 121 km of railways per thousand square kilometers. The major strategic issue for rail transport is decarbonization. The price of EU carbon offset permits has created a strong financial incentive to cut carbon emissions, leading to a plan to electrify half of the remaining 3,000 km by 2030. The rate of development in recent years has been 2.8 km per year, meaning a significant acceleration will be needed to meet the target. There are also plans for high-speed trains, reaching 320 km per hour, for the Prague – Dresden route, with the start planned for 2027.

Water transport has a long tradition in the country but is limited mainly by the total length of navigable river sections. The Vltava and Elbe rivers are used for transporting goods, particularly for long-distance transport of bulk building materials, coal, oil, and its products, as well as containerized goods. However, droughts and low water levels have adversely affected usage in recent years, with the Elbe often too shallow for navigation on many days of the year. There have been proposals to construct more weirs to mitigate this problem, but such projects would be both expensive and effective only if the river is similarly made fully navigable on the German side. The current government is firmly opposed to this.

Additionally, there has long been an idea to link the Danube to the Elbe and the Oder through canals, which would require coordination with Poland,

Slovakia, and Austria. The Ministry of Transport investigated this from 2016 – 2018 and judged it to be economically viable. Although a start was approved in October 2020, the project was abandoned by the new government in February 2023. It is worth noting that this idea has been proposed for over a hundred years, with plans developed but never implemented.

The availability of high-speed internet is gradually improving, even in less populated areas. Nevertheless, the share of households with fixed very high capacity network connections places the Czech Republic in the last third of countries. Coverage is even slightly worse in less populated areas (up to 100 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>). However, as high-speed internet connectivity improves, the risk of cybercrime also increases.

Cybersecurity is managed by the National Cyber and Information Security Agency (Národní úřad pro kybernetickou a informační bezpečnost, NÚKIB), established in 2017 as the central administrative body for cyber security. This includes the protection of classified information in information and communication systems and cryptographic protection. NÚKIB publishes an annual report on the state of cyber security in the Czech Republic.

### Decarbonized Energy System

Policy Efforts  
and Commitment  
to Achieving a  
Decarbonized  
Energy System  
by 2050  
Score: 6

Czechia has been relatively slow in pursuing the decarbonization of its energy system, with progress heavily dependent on EU requirements. Electricity production from renewable sources in Czechia has long lagged behind the European average, as has the share of renewable energy in consumption. The renewable energy share in total final energy consumption was 15.88% in 2019 and 17.7% in 2021, both figures below the OECD average. Electricity production from fossil fuels ranks first, with nuclear energy in second place. The energy crisis of 2022 shifted the ratio of energy production sources in favor of coal-fired power generation. As a result, emissions remain high, with CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from fuel combustion reaching 8.6 metric tons per capita in 2022, placing Czechia among the above-average polluters within the OECD.

In October 2023, the government approved a draft climate and energy plan outlining how the Czech economy should undergo the decarbonization process and meet its European climate and energy commitments by 2030. The plan emphasizes the development of renewable energy sources and energy savings. Currently, three critical documents in the field of climate and energy are under review: the Climate Protection Policy, the National Energy and Climate Plan, and the State Energy Concept. These documents will determine the Czech path to a zero-emission economy and society in the coming years. However, there

are doubts among environmental groups and within the government about whether the targets will be met with current policies.

In 2021, several environmental groups won a ruling from the Prague court obliging the government to set legally binding targets. However, the Supreme Court annulled this ruling in February 2023, citing the absence of a relevant law requiring such targets. In November 2023, representatives of the parliamentary Pirate Party published a draft climate law that included legally binding medium- and long-term targets to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. The draft also specified the establishment of a new Climate Council to oversee a detailed implementation program. Although the Pirates are part of the government, they did not receive, and had previously failed to secure, government support.

### Adaptive Labor Markets

Policies  
Targeting an  
Adaptive Labor  
Market  
Score: 7

The unemployment rate in Czechia has been the lowest in the European Union in recent years, but regional and gender disparities persist. As of September 2023, women comprised 55.8% of total job seekers. Youth unemployment among 15-24-year-olds has decreased compared to the pandemic years, yet remains higher than the national average, albeit low by international standards (6.8% in 2022). Long-term unemployment is a persistent issue, predominantly affecting older and unqualified former workers in regions that were once dependent on older industries.

A major labor market challenge is the continuous labor shortage, estimated at approximately 300,000 against an employed labor force of 5.3 million. This shortage coincides with regional unemployment disparities and a skills mismatch for impending economic changes. Employers' organizations advocate for immigration to address the labor shortage, a step conflicting with anti-immigration rhetoric from certain political factions. Despite this, flexibility has largely been achieved through the recruitment of foreign workers, who constituted 23% of the registered labor force in 2022, bolstered by the arrival of refugees from Ukraine. While some foreign workers came independently seeking employment, many are recruited by employment agencies that supply labor across the economy, including routine manual work in the manufacturing industry. Although a legal framework regulates these agencies' activities, they often offer lower pay and worse conditions compared to regular Czech employees working alongside them.

Maximizing the use of existing resources – which would not fully address the current gaps – requires better transport, housing in areas of labor shortages, and, above all, adequate childcare facilities. These needs clash with policies

that restrict public spending and a 1990s decision to support parents staying at home with young children rather than working.

Czech economic development has heavily depended on relatively routine work within branches of multinational companies, particularly in the motor-vehicle industry. These companies are attracted by lower wages than those in Western Europe and primarily produce for export. Higher pay for more skilled work in Western Europe makes it difficult to develop more demanding activities in Czechia. Technological advancements and the shift to electric vehicles indicate either a reduction in employment in Czechia or the emergence of new products with changed skill requirements. This long-term threat has not been a primary concern for employees, who are most aware of the continuing labor shortage; for multinational companies, which have tended to keep the most modern products at their home bases; or for the government.

Policies  
Targeting an  
Inclusive Labor  
Market  
Score: 8

Czechia's low unemployment rate (2.7% in the third quarter of 2023, according to the ILO, compared with 2.2% in the previous year) suggests a broadly inclusive labor market. While there are regional differences, they are not significant and have declined over time. The highest rates are in areas with a strong reliance on declining traditional industries, especially coal mining – notably Karlovy Vary (3.5%), Ústí nad Labem (4.8%), and the Moravian-Silesian Region (4.0%) – while the lowest were in Plzeň (1.5%) and Vysočina (1.3%). The rate for Prague was 2.4%. Additionally, there is a group that reported a desire to work but did not qualify for the ILO definition of unemployed. If included, this group would add only 1.6 percentage points to the overall unemployment rate.

Areas with high unemployment also had higher numbers of long-term unemployed. Those unemployed for one year or more accounted for 28% of all unemployed. Few of these, among either men or women, were under 30 years of age, suggesting that the causes lie in outdated skills or age-related health problems. The disincentive effect of benefits paid does not appear to be significant. Unemployment benefits provide reasonable protection, but in all cases, they expire before one year, leaving the long-term unemployed dependent on other benefits that provide only a subsistence minimum. They may face foreclosure conditions for unpaid debts, which lead to confiscation of earnings and logically reduce the incentive to find work.

Efforts have been made to provide specific help to the long-term unemployed. A project running from 2019 to 2023, co-financed by the EU, aimed to increase employment levels and limit illegal work. It provides counseling and access to training and short-term employment possibilities. A report on its success has yet to be produced.

Seniors are incentivized to remain employed through tax benefits. Old-age pensions are not taxed up to the volume of 36 times the minimum income, meaning their incomes can be quite high before being taxed. The tax-free allowance for pensioners is the same as for all other workers. Additionally, new legislation in 2023 raised the minimum for early retirement to 40 years of insurance contributions, up from 35 years. Retirement age will also be set annually for people turning 50, based on the development of national life expectancy.

Following an EU directive of August 2019 on work-life balance and transparent working conditions, a new Czech law will take effect on October 1, 2023, with certain provisions delayed until January 1, 2024. Key modifications include expanded employer information duties, electronic contracting options for labor transactions, rules for remote work, enhanced rights for parent employees, and relaxed formalities for the service of process. Notably, employees can request remote work, and refusal requires a specified reason. Remote work arrangements will require written agreements, with reimbursement rules for expenses incurred. Employers are advised to review and update their labor documentation to comply with the amended requirements.

Employers are required to provide appropriate working conditions for young people, ensuring tasks align with their physical and mental capabilities. Regulations prohibit juvenile workers from engaging in overtime, night work (except for brief educational purposes), or underground work in mining or tunneling. Individuals aged 15 and above who have completed compulsory schooling may be employed. Working hours for young people aged 15-18 are capped at 40 hours per week, with shifts not exceeding 8 hours. Regional branches of the Czech Labor Office oversee decisions regarding the employment of children, ensuring compliance with these regulations.

Policies  
Targeting Labor  
Market Risks  
Score: 7

Existing labor laws in Czechia provide substantial protection to employees by limiting excessive working hours, preventing arbitrary dismissals, and ensuring rights to holidays. However, challenges persist due to the lack of such rights and protections for those outside standard employment contracts and potentially poor enforcement for those with regular employment contracts. The former category includes individuals working under contracts for individual tasks, which encompasses many registered as self-employed. The full extent of such fraudulent forms of self-employment cannot be estimated accurately, but estimates range between 2% and 4% of the labor force. Students and other young people also frequently work under casual contracts with pay levels that start around the subsistence minimum.

A significant amendment to the Czech labor code, incorporating EU directives on work-life balance and transparent working conditions, will take effect on October 1, 2023, with certain provisions delayed until January 1, 2024. These modifications include expanded employer information duties, electronic contracting options for labor transactions, rules for remote work, enhanced rights for parent employees, and relaxed formalities for the service of process. Remote work arrangements will require rights to breaks during working hours and holidays. However, these changes will not affect work under contracts for specific tasks, provided the employer can prove that it is not effectively an employment contract (i.e., fixed working hours, a defined workplace, a hierarchical relationship with an “employer” able to order changes to work tasks). For many in casual work arrangements, it is extremely difficult to challenge the contract they are offered.

The enforcement of labor law is bolstered by the presence of trade unions, which can, and often do, negotiate collective agreements that improve protections and working conditions. Employers have obligations toward worker representatives, including facilitating their activities and providing leave with compensatory wages. Transnational information access rights are also outlined, requiring certain employers to provide information and consultation through European Works Councils or agreed procedures. Union membership in the Czech Republic stands at around 12% of employees, with ČMKOS being the dominant force. Data from 2022 showed that 45% of all employees were covered by collective bargaining, 52% were not covered, and the remainder were unclear. Pay was 17% higher for those covered, and hours worked were marginally less.

**Sustainable Taxation**

Policies  
Targeting  
Adequate Tax  
Revenue  
Score: 6

By European standards, the Czech tax system features a low level of direct taxes, both on companies and individuals, which results in a relatively low share of government revenue in GDP. This significantly constrains the government’s ability to finance infrastructure investment, which has been heavily dependent on EU support – a source expected to decline. Low tax levels reflect governments’ attempts to win electoral support by holding down personal tax levels.

The average income tax rate during the observed period was lower than the OECD average (27%), decreasing from 25.21% in 2020 to 19.70% in 2021 and 19.48% in 2022. These changes were made by the Babiš government before the parliamentary elections in 2021 and during a time of a growing budget deficit due to pandemic measures. The effective average tax rate for

businesses was 16.70% in 2020 and 17.0% in 2021, lower than the OECD average of 20%.

The tax system is administered by the Financial Administration under the Ministry of Finance, employing 14,000 individuals, half of whom are engaged in checking tax returns. The administration consistently complains of inadequate resources for countering tax evasion, yet it claims to have identified CZK 37 billion in otherwise unpaid taxes in 2022. Identified serious tax fraud typically relates to VAT, and 867 such cases were referred for legal action in 2022, totaling CZK 5.5 billion. The most serious was the OCTAVIAN case, involving tax evasion of CZK 700 million and taking over eight years to investigate. Eleven individuals finally faced charges for activities in the period 2009 – 2010, although the key figure had yet to be extradited from the UK, where he claimed asylum on the grounds that he could not expect a fair trial in Czechia. According to the Financial Administration, such investigations typically require multi-agency cooperation across several countries, for which only very limited resources are available.

Reducing VAT evasion among smaller businesses remains a controversial issue. To address this, compulsory electronic cash registration was introduced in 2016 for catering and hotels and in 2017 for retail, with plans for expansion to more sectors in 2020. The initiative was always opposed by the ODS and vocal small-business owners, who cited the additional financial burden of purchasing the necessary equipment. The system was completely abolished under the Fiala government at the start of 2024. Opponents argued it was expensive and ineffective. Babiš claimed it had generated CZK 35 billion in extra revenue, though that claim is difficult to verify. While the introduction of electronic cash registers coincided with an increase in VAT revenue, this did not result in a higher share of total tax revenue.

The Financial Administration of Czechia plans to build a new information system, set to be partially operational in 2026, to establish a central database, improve tax collection efficiency, and detect tax evasion.

Policies  
Targeting Tax  
Equity  
Score: 6

The tax administration in Czechia strives to apply the principle of horizontal equity to the extent its resources allow. Taxpayers have the right to appeal tax office decisions, and in 2022, 4,991 individuals exercised this right, with 3,705 appeals related to VAT assessments. Of these, 2,123 were accepted by the tax authorities. Those dissatisfied with the outcomes can file complaints through the court system; 517 did so in 2022, although most of these complaints were rejected.

Vertical equity is a crucial aspect of the personal income tax system. No tax is levied on an amount equivalent to roughly 70% of the average wage. A 15% tax rate applies to income up to 48 times the minimum wage, after which the tax rate increases to 23%. However, this structure adds little to progressivity, as social insurance payments increase with income up to that threshold and are then capped.

Comparatively low corporate tax rates benefit high-income individuals and private companies, many of which transfer income out of the country to lower-tax regimes. In October 2023, the Chamber of Deputies approved a law on equalization taxes to ensure a minimum level of taxation for large multinational and domestic groups. Czechia will require these groups to pay at least a 15% income tax, which is lower than the current effective rate. This move positions Czechia among countries not allowing themselves to become tax havens. However, it does not prevent companies operating in Czechia from finding ways to declare profits elsewhere and avoid Czech taxation.

Policies Aimed at  
Minimizing  
Compliance  
Costs  
Score: 7

The Czech tax system is rather complicated and has accumulated several exceptions over the years. Complaints about its complexity and the administrative burden have been strongest from small business owners. In 2022, a system was introduced to alleviate this burden, allowing these owners to make a single payment covering both income tax and compulsory insurance contributions. Under this system, following a single declaration, the payment remains constant even if their incomes vary month to month. Although this system was initially welcomed as a good idea, survey evidence suggested that only 7% of small business owners used it in its first year, rising to 10% in 2023. The main reason for the low uptake was that it did not offer significant benefits, suggesting that the existing system was not too complicated to pose serious problems for many.

The tax administration has been accused of being overly rigid, failing to distinguish between mistakes and attempts to defraud. A significant number of cases end up in court, indicating that the cost of litigation is not prohibitive for everyone. Several law firms offer to take up these cases, with costs equivalent to at least ten times the average wage in terms of hours of a lawyer’s time.

Policies Aimed at  
Internalizing  
Negative and  
Positive  
Externalities  
Score: 8

The concept of externalities has influenced Czech tax policy, though it has not been the principal driver. The policy has evolved partly in response to pressures from particular interests and input from the EU, which has contributed to the introduction of environmental taxes. While the resulting share of environmental taxes appears high by international standards, this reflects the continued high use of environmentally harmful heating and transport fuels rather than a genuine concern for environmental issues.



Vehicles are taxed according to EU emission standards, with the worst offenders incurring significant tax supplements while the best face no extra tax. Environmental taxation, as defined by EU carbon trading rules, has also influenced transport policy, as indicated in the section on Resilient Critical Infrastructure.

Tax deductions are available for firms engaged in research and development (R&D), but these have proven difficult to claim. The number of firms interested fell from 1,306 in 2015 to 835 in 2021, the latest year for which information is available. The problem lies in the stringent conditions for defining R&D imposed by the tax administration and upheld in court judgments. These conditions require systematic activity that leads to something demonstrably new, not merely the adaptation of an existing product. There is no specific targeting to focus on particular areas and their usefulness, although this can be addressed in accompanying policies for research support through subsidies.

### Sustainable Budgeting

Sustainable  
Budgeting  
Policies  
Score: 6

Czechia is not threatened by budget instability and has implemented rules to ensure ongoing stability. The Czech Fiscal Council, established as an independent body in 2017, oversees and comments on the state of public finances and compliance with legal fiscal responsibility rules. Its membership is dominated by the banking sector, and it typically warns of potential future dangers, as is its remit. The council has welcomed the reduction of budget deficits in the years since the pandemic, while also emphasizing the need for continued deficit reductions to ensure long-term stability.

The state budget has become an issue of internal political controversy, with the Fiala government warning of an imminent and serious threat to budget stability that justified a package of emergency measures. The evidence cited for this threat was an increase in the ratio of gross debt-to-GDP from 30.0% in 2019 to 44.2% in 2022 and 44.7% in 2023, while the budget deficit to GDP ratio was 3.2% in 2022. All of these values are better, or much better, than average by EU standards. Additionally, the debt level in 2019, the base year chosen for the government's argument, was exceptionally low, while the 2023 level had been matched before. Nevertheless, it was emphasized that debt relative to GDP had been increasing more rapidly than in any other EU member state. This was partly a consequence of exceptionally poor GDP performance, with only 0.2% growth from 2019 to 2022 following poor performance during the pandemic and exceptionally high inflation after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, alongside slow growth in personal incomes that

led to a substantial reduction in real spending and, consequently, both tax revenues and GDP. The chosen method to reduce the budget deficit includes cuts in spending and increases in taxation, with the former contributing two-thirds of the adjustment. This approach is expected to lead to only a slight further reduction in demand, which will be more than offset by a return to wage growth and increased consumer spending alongside declining inflation. The Ministry of Finance predicts that GDP will grow by 1.9% in 2024, following a 0.5% decline in 2023, and that the budget deficit will fall to 3.64% of GDP in 2023 and 2.2% in 2024. Debt, however, will still be rising. It is acknowledged that these predictions could be overly optimistic in light of unforeseen external events.

Changes on the revenue side include an increase in the tax on companies from 19% to 21%. This is judged to have minimal effect on company behavior and possibly to be beneficial for the balance of payments current account, which suffers from increasing repatriation of profits by multinational companies. A further element is a windfall tax on increased profits of energy companies and banks to cover the costs of supporting consumers through the energy price crisis. This too should have no significant disincentive effect, but strong doubts have been raised over whether estimates of the revenue it will raise are exaggerated.

A range of other tax changes will reduce the VAT bands from three to two, increase property tax, and make changes to personal income tax.

Significant changes on the spending side include weaker indexation for pensions, a 2% cut in funding for public sector pay, and sweeping reductions in subsidies to enterprises. All of these carry implications for other government objectives.

The adequacy of pensions is discussed in the Old-Age Poverty Prevention section. Public sector pay can influence recruitment into, and hence the quality of, essential activities such as education and research. Subsidies have also been important for adapting the economy toward reducing carbon dependence.

Any such negative consequences may be partly offset, at least for a few years, by the EU-funded National Renewal Plan (Národní plán obnovy, NPO), which offers the equivalent of 1.5% of the 2023 GDP to be allocated by 2026 for projects in digital transformation, infrastructure and green transformation, education and training, research and development and innovation, health, and some other areas. This will be in addition to the support under existing Structural Funds for 2021 – 2027, equivalent to 9% of 2021 GDP over the seven-year period.

Research and  
Innovation Policy  
Score: 7

### Sustainability-oriented Research and Innovation

The government has made verbal commitments to improving research and innovation, but questions remain about the likely effectiveness of the proposed policies. Additionally, there is no strong orientation toward sustainability.

The most recent strategic document on research and innovation, “Czech Republic The Country For The Future,” was developed by the Council for Research, Development, and Innovation within the Government Office under the Babiš administration. The stated aim was to increase R&D spending from 1.79% of GDP in 2019 to 3% of GDP by 2030, with 1% from the public sector and 2% from the enterprise sector. However, spending has been fairly stable for some years, with public spending at around 0.65% of GDP since 2011. This figure places the country in the middle of the EU and OECD ranges, reflecting spending in universities and research institutes.

In 2021, the last year with complete data, 59% of public spending was dedicated to fundamental research, mostly in the natural sciences. A weakness has been the relatively low level of research in enterprises, which has also remained fairly stable. Larger firms with modern technology are typically branches of foreign-owned multinationals. With a few exceptions, these firms have little interest in moving research activities to Czechia. Nevertheless, they dominate enterprise research spending, with the largest share in the automotive industry. For example, the Škoda car manufacturer, owned by Volkswagen, has a significant research facility, although it is not involved in developing the company’s most modern technologies.

The government’s plan does not address this issue and does not specify priority sectors or activities. The Council for Research, Development, and Innovation does identify successful research areas and has established a subcommittee for research on climate change issues, but it focuses on discussing research rather than its applications in the enterprise sphere.

Large, foreign-owned companies in 2021 received CZK 1.5 billion of the total CZK 2.4 billion in tax support. In contrast, of the CZK 3.8 billion in direct subsidies, CZK 3.3 billion went to domestically owned firms.

Further support for research is threatened by dependence on EU funding and by the government’s prioritizing of spending cuts to reduce public debt. The NPO promises CZK 5 billion to support research and innovation in enterprises, conditional on the establishment of a coordinating group for that activity. Goals under this heading are vague, and no bids had been invited by February 2024.

Global Financial  
Policies  
Score: 8

### Stable Global Financial System

Czechia is not a significant player in international financial affairs. At best, it follows the initiatives of others. Its main banks are foreign-owned, and their independent international involvement is limited.

The country is a member of the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust) and, since 2008, has joined international investigation teams. While the country is not a tax haven, many of its businesses choose to be formally registered in low-tax jurisdictions, often obscuring actual ownership.

Domestic financial stability is overseen by the Czech National Bank, which conducts macro stress tests across all segments of the domestic financial sector to confirm its resilience. The share of nonperforming loans to total gross loans has been decreasing steadily: it was 1.7% in 2021, 1.46% in 2022, and continued to decline in 2023. Similarly, nonperforming loans provided by units included in the general government have also shown a decreasing trend, amounting to 0.49% in 2020 and 0.43% in 2021.

## II. Social Sustainability

### Sustainable Education System

Policies  
Targeting Quality  
Education  
Score: 8

Government spending on education is largely determined by legal requirements and government commitments, especially regarding pay levels. While investment in education and training has increased overall, it remains low at the pre-primary and primary levels. Public spending on education rose from 4.5% of GDP in 2019 to 4.67% in 2020, still below the OECD average of 5%.

The pupil-to-teacher ratio was 12.3 in 2020 and 11.7 in 2021, but recruitment has been challenging due to issues related to pay and the profession’s prestige. The average age of teachers is around 46 years. In primary schools, 40% of teachers are over 50 years old; in secondary schools, this figure is 52%.

Specific features of the Czech education system include a low proportion of individuals with tertiary qualifications, a high proportion with upper secondary qualifications, and relatively low participation in education for children aged 3 to 5. The latter reflects recent family policies that offer robust support for

parents staying home with young children. High participation in full-time education up to age 18 was established before 1989. The low number of tertiary-qualified individuals is also largely a legacy of the past, resulting in a workforce that may be less adaptable. This situation was compatible with economic development that emphasized medium-skilled work in various branches of foreign manufacturing companies.

In December 2023, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, MŠMT) presented the Long-term Plan for Education and Development of the Education System of the Czech Republic 2023 – 2027, a conceptual plan for modernizing education for the next four years. The plan envisions an innovation of the secondary education system based on a balanced share of general education and vocational fields, along with efforts to better link both to systems supporting graduates' future careers. At the same time, the quality of practical teaching in vocational schools is to be improved by enhancing cooperation with employers by incorporating elements of the dual system.

Even with constraints on the state budget, some funding for investment and improvements will, at least for a time, be available from the NPO. This will support the construction of unspecified objects for prestigious universities in Prague and Brno. It is hoped that resources and running costs will be subsequently available, even as several universities struggle to make full use of their facilities. There will also be support for courses in higher education to promote digital competence and to remove children from institutional environments.

According to statistics from the European Commission, the Czech Republic ranked in 2021 among the countries with the lowest percentage of the adult population in continuous and long-term education, with only 5.8% of adults receiving regular monthly education. This figure is below the EU average of 10.8%. A call has been issued under the NPO for further professional education in digital competence, which will be administered by labor offices. The impact remains to be seen.

Policies  
Targeting  
Equitable Access  
to Education  
Score: 7

The Czech state educational system provides compulsory school education for all for effectively 10 years. However, three notable problems remain concerning equity and access.

First, there is poor provision for the earliest years. Preschool education is among the least accessible in the EU. The share of children between the ages of three and the starting age of compulsory primary education who participated in early childhood education and care was 79.8% in 2022, putting

Czechia in 26th place in the OECD – with a much lower figure for those under three years of age.

Second, there is limited access to tertiary education. Although there are no fees for standard public higher education, additional support is limited. Grants are available at the discretion of the institution for those living away from the family home and for those from very low-income backgrounds. The total sum spent on the latter in 2022 was CZK 14.1 million, suggesting that there were few student recipients. Private universities, which account for about 10% of the total student number, receive government support only for the above forms of student aid.

Students can and do support themselves through working, frequently in flexible forms outside the standard employment contract, such as in catering, retail, and seasonal agricultural work. It remains unclear how far financial difficulties limit access to higher education.

The third problem for equitable access is discrimination against the disadvantaged Roma population, who are disproportionately educated in special schools. They represent about one-third of the pupils in these institutions, with 10.3% of Roma children enrolled, compared to 2% of children overall. In 2007, the European Court of Human Rights delivered a landmark judgment, upholding an individual's complaint that he had been assigned to a special school based on ethnicity rather than ability. In February 2023, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe concluded that there had been only minimal change in outcomes, noting that the testing system remained biased against Roma.

### Sustainable Institutions Supporting Basic Human Needs

Policies  
Targeting Equal  
Access to  
Essential Services  
and Basic Income  
Support  
Score: 8

Almost the entire population of Czechia has access to public water and sewerage systems. Due to a favorable employment picture and a redistributive social policy, primarily through the pension system, income inequality and poverty in Czechia remain among the lowest in the OECD and the European Union. This also means that Czechia performs reasonably well in international comparisons regarding the ability to maintain heating and afford an internet connection. However, significant regional differences persist.

A substantial proportion of the Roma population – an estimated 2.2% of the overall Czech population – suffers from social exclusion. Another critical issue is the lack of affordable housing and the growing number of homeless people, including children and seniors. By the end of July 2022, the average

household in Czechia spent 29% of its income on housing, a significant increase from 23% in November 2021. Vulnerable households spent almost half their income on housing (Muggins et al. 2022: 21).

Czechia still lacks a satisfactory affordable housing system, missing both a legislative framework and a long-term strategy. According to the Ministry of Regional Development, more than a tenth of the Czech population may be affected by housing unaffordability.

The energy crisis precipitated by the war in Ukraine led to an average energy price increase of 61.5% for households in the Czech Republic between June 2021 and 2023. Pensioners and low-income families were the most affected. Government-approved support measures mitigated the crisis's impact. Although no special low-income household tariffs for energy were available, individuals could apply for energy, housing, or emergency assistance. In 2023, the government fixed electricity and gas prices, spending CZK 84 billion to keep costs down. This measure will end in 2024, along with a reduced subsidy for renewable energy, which is expected to result in higher prices. The exact consequences for consumers remain to be seen.

Policies  
Targeting Quality  
of Essential  
Services and  
Basic Income  
Support  
Score: 7

Although indicators of poverty suggest a relatively favorable position for Czechia, this is largely due to high employment levels and adequate old-age pensions. However, certain sections of the population face significant hardship, with limited assistance from the welfare system. The social benefits system in Czechia is complex and challenging to access for many people. Labor offices responsible for dispersing social benefits are understaffed, which results in payment delays and difficulties associated with applications for benefits. Those in need are also often stigmatized, a prejudice exploited regularly by political actors.

Accessing entitled benefits is problematic. For example, only 25% of eligible parents apply for child benefits, and only a fifth of those eligible for housing benefits receive them. Beginning in January 2024, changes under the government's expenditure-saving budget reforms will reduce unemployment benefits for some claimants. These benefits are already quite stringent, starting at 65% of previous earnings for two months, falling to 50% for the next two months, and then to 45% for the remaining period of entitlement, which varies with age up to a maximum of five additional months. In October 2023, only 28.3% of job seekers registered at labor offices received any unemployment benefits.

Determining eligibility for social support is crucial, particularly through the living and subsistence minimums. The living minimum is the socially

recognized threshold of monetary income needed to provide for food and other essential personal needs. The subsistence minimum is the minimum income necessary to cover food and other basic needs at a level that ensures survival. Neither the living minimum nor the subsistence minimum includes essential housing costs, which are covered by a separate housing benefit.

The living minimum is decisive in assessing material needs and determining entitlement to certain social benefits. In 2023, it was set at the equivalent of 11% of the average wage for a single-person household. This is the entitlement, for example, for those who are unemployed after their unemployment benefit entitlements have expired.

Another significant issue is the large number of people unable to pay their debts. As of July 2023, 660,200 people (7.6% of the total population) were under court foreclosure orders requiring the sale of property and automatic deduction from their incomes to pay off past debts. Many had multiple such orders, with a total of 4.08 million orders in force at the time. Some relief was offered by a “summer of grace” granting amnesties for some payments of interest and additional fines. The total number facing foreclosure fell slightly to 646,006 in January 2024, although the reduction primarily affected those with only minor debts (Mugglin et al. 2022: 21).

This leaves a significant proportion of the population in financial paralysis. The situation is particularly severe in old industrial areas, with 18% of the population in the Most district under foreclosure, rising to 26% among the 50–64 age group.

### Sustainable Health System

Policies  
Targeting Health  
System  
Resilience  
Score: 7

Healthcare quality in primary, secondary, and preventive care is close to the OECD average. Healthcare expenditure was 9.06% of GDP in 2022, slightly above the OECD average. There was a slight decline after increased spending during the pandemic, reflecting the reduced need for spending to deal with the pandemic and the impact of inflation. There are 4.3 practicing doctors per 1,000 population (OECD average: 3.7) and 9.0 practicing nurses (OECD average: 9.2). Czechia has 6.7 hospital beds per 1,000 population, more than the OECD average of 4.3. [1]

“A National Strategy for Health Service Digitalisation” was published in 2014 and updated in 2020, but progress has been slow. Telemedicine has yet to be regulated, but during the COVID-19 pandemic, health insurance companies reimbursed remote consultations. In 2018, systems of electronic prescriptions



and sick notes were launched. Under the strategy and associated legislation, a system was to be in place from 2022 so information could be safely shared between providers, and there was to be a register of providers and patients, with the latter also able to access information. However, a report by the NKÚ revealed that as of October 2023, doctors still could not access all useful information. The legal framework created was inadequate, and elements covered by laws had yet to be implemented. Money spent over the 2019 – 2022 period, therefore, did not lead to the intended results.

Policies  
Targeting High-  
Quality  
Healthcare  
Score: 8

In July 2020, the Czech government adopted a strategic framework for the development of healthcare through 2030, refined after the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the objectives of this program is the integration of long-term health and social care and the creation of regionally specific models of such care. Individual regions also have integrated healthcare concepts, considering their specific demographic, health, geographical, and economic situations.

The greatest problems, in relative terms, lie outside the direct realm of the health service. Both life expectancy and healthy life expectancy are below the OECD averages, and Czechia scores poorly on deaths attributable to high air pollution, low activity levels, and high alcohol consumption. These factors are reflected in relatively high mortality rates due to heart conditions. The unhealthy lifestyle of the Czech population is also evident in the high proportion of overweight or obese individuals, with 54.8% of the population aged 15 and older falling into these categories.

The picture is more favorable regarding preventive health services. Preventive healthcare is regulated by statutory standards that determine what preventive care citizens in particular age groups are entitled to and how often they receive it. Preventive check-ups are followed by screening programs designed to detect cancer at an early stage. These programs are funded by health insurance and conducted at accredited centers. Participation is voluntary, and the level of involvement varies depending on the type of screening program. For instance, 58% of women were screened for breast cancer, surpassing the OECD average of 55%, marking the highest participation rate among the programs offered. During the period analyzed, there were five screening programs in Czechia. As of January 2024, the number has increased to six. Bids are being invited under the NPO to improve colorectal screening levels, from either the private or public sector. Health insurance companies also support some recommended voluntary vaccinations, with a greater emphasis on children and seniors. On average, 2% of the total state budget expenditure on healthcare is allocated to preventive care.

Policies  
Targeting  
Equitable Access  
To Healthcare  
Score: 7

A core set of healthcare services covers the entire population in Czechia. Under the public health insurance system, all individuals with permanent residence in Czechia are required to have health insurance. Additionally, individuals without permanent residence in Czechia must be insured if they are employed by an employer with a registered office or permanent residence in the country. Currently, there are seven health insurance companies in Czechia, though they do not compete on the quality of healthcare provision.

Mandatory prepayment covers 86.4% of total healthcare expenditure (2021), which is higher than the OECD average. Healthcare is generally accessible to all population groups without exception. General satisfaction with the availability of quality healthcare in Czechia is high at 77%, compared to the OECD average of 67% (OECD 2023).

Health insurance companies are obligated to ensure the timely and local availability of healthcare. However, according to data from the Institute of Health Information and Statistics of the Czech Republic (ÚZIS ČR), an average of 8% of children were not registered with a pediatrician by the end of 2022. Many Ukrainian refugees in Czechia have also reported difficulties finding a general practitioner, pediatrician, dentist, or gynecologist. There are regional differences in healthcare availability that seem inversely related to need. For example, life expectancy is 5% higher in Prague than in Ústecký, the region with the worst health profile, and infant mortality in Prague is only one-third the level in Ústecký. Long-term health problems are also more commonly reported in Ústecký. Despite this, the number of non-hospital doctors is 2.2 times higher in Prague than in the Ústecký region.

### Gender Equality

Policy Efforts  
and Commitment  
to Achieving  
Gender Equality  
Score: 6

Czechia is formally committed to gender equality, with references to equality found in the constitution and the labor code. The Council for Equality of Men and Women, consisting of 42 members from ministries, other public bodies, and outside interests, exists within the Government Office. In March 2021, the government adopted the Government Strategy for Equality of Women and Men for 2021-2030. This strategy provides a clear framework for gender equality over the medium term and sets government priorities each year.

Despite these commitments, Czechia does not compare favorably with other EU or OECD members regarding gender equality. The primary issues include labor market disparities, such as significant income differences between women and men, and higher rates of poverty among women. Additional problems include the underrepresentation of women in decision-making

positions, horizontal gender segregation in education, and stereotypical role distribution in household and family care, which negatively affects the balance of work and family responsibilities.

In 2022, the gender pay gap stood at 16.4%, while the EU average was 13%. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2023, Czechia ranked 101 out of 146 countries in 2022. Although more women than men have tertiary education, and this trend is increasing, the representation of women in leadership positions does not reflect this. Women's representation in parliament has long been between 15% and 22%, leaving Czechia behind the OECD average. The situation improved after the last elections to the Chamber of Deputies (Lower House) when the proportion of women reached 25%.

The low level of commitment to gender issues from some leading politicians was demonstrated in the controversy over the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention of 2011, which aims to prevent and combat violence against women and sets out requirements for legal protections and their monitoring. Czechia continually postponed ratification, and Senate committees through 2023 argued for rejection. Despite government support, the convention was narrowly rejected by a Senate vote in January 2024, making Czechia one of five EU members yet to ratify the convention.

Opponents from all political groups represented in the Senate, apart from the Pirate Party, argued against the convention. Concerns included fears that it was introducing "gender ideology" (the word "gender" is used in the convention) and attacking the "traditional form of the family." Some also argued that existing laws were sufficient and that no additional measures were necessary, despite Czech police in 2022 reporting 76 domestic-related murders, 880 rapes, and 430 cases of domestic abuse, with the clear likelihood that many more of the latter two went unreported. Regardless, the convention will still apply in Czechia as it was approved by the EU for all member states in 2023.

### Strong Families

Family Policies  
Score: 6

The length of paid maternity and parental leave exceeds the OECD average, offering 28 weeks of maternity leave. Both parents can take leave until the child's third birthday, although only one parent can benefit at a time. In addition to maternity and parental allowances, there is also a paternity allowance – father-specific leave that, starting in 2022, can be taken for a maximum of two weeks. Employees can also take leave to care for a sick child under ten or a child with a serious illness.

Under the labor code, a parent can return to a position corresponding to the employment contract's job description until the child reaches the age of three. Returning to work can be problematic for women due to poor provision of care for very young children. Enrollment in formal childcare for the age group 0 – 2 years is only 1.8% and 54.5% for the age group 3 – 5 years. The situation improves among older age groups, reaching 93% for five-year-olds, as kindergarten attendance during the last year of preschool has been mandatory since 2017.

While public support for alternative forms of childcare, including kindergartens and so-called children's groups, has expanded, the gap in childcare facilities has persisted. In 2022 and 2023, there was an additional need to admit children with temporary protection coming from Ukraine to kindergartens and children's groups. The NPO offers the prospect of some help for a few years with calls for projects to expand childcare facilities – identified as a cause of gender inequality – from non-state bodies and from regional and municipal authorities.

Returning to the labor market after parental leave and balancing family and work life are also hindered by the limited use of part-time work or flexible working hours. In 2022, only 6.2% of employees in the Czech Republic worked part-time; of these, three-quarters were women.

### Sustainable Pension System

Policies Aimed at  
Old-Age Poverty  
Prevention  
Score: 7

The Czech pension system has developed through gradual and partial reform of the pay-as-you-go system that existed before 1989. Its centerpiece is a mandatory public pension insurance scheme, administered by the Czech Social Security Administration (Česká správa sociálního zabezpečení, ČSSZ). Income and spending have been roughly in balance over the years, sometimes with a small surplus and sometimes – as in 2022 – with a small deficit. In addition, there are supplementary pension savings schemes supported by the state in the form of contributions and tax relief.

The official minimum retirement age, which has gradually increased since 1996, differs for men and women. For women, this age depends on the number of children reared. In 2017, the maximum retirement age for both sexes was set at 65 years. Since the late 1990s, there have been efforts to prepare and adopt significant pension reforms, including a division into a basic pension plus a voluntary additional pension that could be administered by private funds. These changes have never won the political consensus necessary to ensure permanence.

The main change in practice has been the periodic increase in the pension age, which has lagged slightly behind the increase in life expectancy. From 1993 to 2022, male life expectancy increased by 6.4 years while the pension age increased by 5 years. Meanwhile, the level of state pension fell from the equivalent of 49% of average earnings to 42% (45% for men and 37% for women), with 31% reported as facing foreclosure proceedings to reclaim unpaid debts. This does not indicate an imminent threat to the system's sustainability, assuming gradual increases in the pension age continue in the future.

Price increases in 2022 and 2023 significantly impacted pensioners in Czechia. The government responded with an extraordinary indexation of pensions. However, in early 2023, it proposed – and in July implemented – a change to the indexation system. This adjustment meant the average pension would increase by only 4% instead of 9% in response to inflation, a move that was highly controversial.

The argument was that old-age pensioners were generally not living in poverty (the relative income poverty rate among people aged 66+ was below 6% in 2023), and pensions could reach nearly 50% of the average wage (presumably calculated with the assumption that average wages would not rise in 2023). Pensions were seen as becoming an immediate threat to the state's financial stability. As a result, the measure was pushed through parliament as a special measure requiring only limited discussion.

A complaint regarding this and other procedural aspects was rejected by the Constitutional Court in January 2024, but more complaints could follow. Further changes to pensions included tightening eligibility for early retirement from five to three years before the statutory retirement age, effective October 2023. The length of pension insurance required to obtain an early retirement pension also increased to 40 years. While this may help increase the labor force, it will negatively impact those with shorter tenures in the labor market and those whose poor health hampers working into old age.

Proposals for a more substantial pension reform are promised for early 2024. A proposal has been put forward for discussion to introduce a more formal link between retirement ages and life expectancy.

Policies  
Targeting  
Intergenerational  
Equity  
Score: 7

To fulfill the right to material security in retirement guaranteed by the constitution, the pension system must combine both solidarity and merit functions. While it provides reasonable protection against poverty, the replacement ratios for high-income groups are significantly lower. The additional costs imposed by an aging population – increasing the number of

people above the pension age – have been offset by lower pensions relative to earnings and a slightly higher burden on the incomes of the working generation.

Increasing the working population can further ensure balance. Citizens can continue to be employed without restriction while receiving a retirement pension. If social insurance is paid on this income, one can apply to the ČSSZ to recalculate the pension at regular intervals, but any increase is minimal. The employment rate of people aged 55 – 64 (72.9%) is higher than the OECD average, and the trend is upward due to gradual adjustments to the retirement age. In the Czech Republic, it is possible to receive a retirement pension and work simultaneously without restrictions. In 2021, the share of working pensioners was 10.7% of all employed people.

### Sustainable Inclusion of Migrants

Integration Policy  
Score: 8

Czechia has a mixed record in integrating foreigners. Before the conflict in Ukraine, it was not known for welcoming refugees. In 2022, there were 1,694 asylum applications, of which 92 were granted, and 25 individuals were granted citizenship. However, increasing numbers of foreigners had come temporarily to work, including citizens from other EU member states, Ukraine, Vietnam, and the Russian Federation.

The situation transformed in 2022 when refugees from Ukraine were welcomed. The exact figure is unclear, but by October 2023, 453,725 had been granted temporary protection. An unknown number have since returned to Ukraine or moved elsewhere. Official data showed 635,857 Ukrainians in the country at the end of 2022.

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the European Union activated the Temporary Protection Directive, which has also been applied in Czechia. This directive grants rights including residence permits, access to the labor market and housing, medical assistance, and access to education for children. According to a Voice of Ukrainians in the Czech Republic survey, one-fifth of Ukrainian refugees in Czechia did not see a doctor despite needing medical care. Many refugees face language barriers, lack of information, and long waiting times.

There were also early complaints from Ukrainian Roma of systematic and individual racism, which led to them being denied help for weeks.

By the end of 2022, foreigners made up about 10% of the population, with 57% from Ukraine and 10% from Slovakia. This is an increase from 6% in 2021. In 2022, foreign citizens accounted for 23% of the labor force registered by labor offices. Of these, 80% were working, including 47% of Ukrainians. However, foreign citizens often work in low-skilled jobs, frequently recruited in their home countries by employment agencies for work in manufacturing.

For people from non-EU countries, the only way to apply their qualifications in the Czech labor market is through the recognition of their diploma, known as nostrification. This process is often lengthy, leading to complaints from many employers seeking qualified labor. One significant example is the health sector, which suffers from a shortage of doctors and nurses and could benefit from newcomers with non-EU medical degrees who otherwise occupy unskilled positions. Foreigners may encounter several barriers when seeking employment that matches their qualifications, one of which is a lack of knowledge of the Czech language. Language courses for adults with the legal right to stay in the country are provided by regional Centers for the Integration of Foreigners. The largest of these is the Integration Center Prague (Integrační centrum Praha ICP), a non-governmental organization receiving funding from the EU, the Czech government, and municipal authorities. However, it does not offer courses beyond a basic level.

### Effective Capacity-Building for Global Poverty Reduction

Management of  
Development  
Cooperation by  
Partner Country  
Score: 5

Czechia is not a significant player in international development, dedicating a relatively low share of GDP to development aid. Up to 2021, this share stood at 0.13% – one of the lowest among OECD countries – and rose to 0.36% in 2022, still below the OECD average. This aid includes a systematic and planned element administered and monitored by the Czech Development Agency under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The agency has a strategy for the 2018–2030 period, allocating resources for humanitarian aid and transformation cooperation. Priority countries for development cooperation include Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ethiopia, Moldova, Georgia, Cambodia, and Zambia. In 2022, 108 specific projects were supported, focusing on water resources, combating erosion, developing social protection and participation, education, and rural development. Czechia frequently collaborates with EU agencies, thereby gaining experience in development activities. However, total spending for all these projects was equivalent to only 0.006% of GDP.

Humanitarian aid in response to catastrophes and assistance to Ukraine, along with a large allocation for Ukrainian refugees in Moldova, are provided under a separate assistance program. Other foreign aid programs operate under the

responsibility of various ministries. This assistance includes economic and financial cooperation, security, cybersecurity, technical assistance, strengthening the capacity of universities in developing countries, and government development scholarships. Development projects are also implemented in cooperation with international organizations. Nevertheless, the total expenditure is small, and the systematically planned element appears very small relative to the country's resources.

### III. Environmental Sustainability

#### Effective Climate Action

Policy Efforts  
and Commitment  
to Achieving  
Climate  
Neutrality by  
2050  
Score: 6

Czech environmental policy is shaped by the country's obligations to implement EU legislation. The National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) from November 2019 outlines the main targets and policies in all five dimensions of the Energy Union for 2021–2030. The Czech Republic's primary goal is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30% by 2030.

The updated NECP from 2023 shows some progress toward fulfilling international commitments under the Paris Agreement and presents an ostensibly comprehensive strategy. However, the adequacy of the policies has faced criticism both internally and externally. Within the government, this is evidenced by the Pirate Party's proposal for a law with binding commitments. Externally, the European Commission criticized the plan in December 2023.

The updated plan reaffirms the intention to phase out coal for energy and heat generation by 2033 but lacks a precise timeline for eliminating existing fossil fuel subsidies. It does not analyze relevant vulnerabilities and risks and fails to specify how adaptation policies align with Energy Union objectives and policies. Additionally, the NECP lacks clarity on the scope, timing, and expected impacts of adaptation efforts, including ensuring adequate water resources for cooling nuclear power plants.

The document outlines ambitious renovation plans for buildings but lacks specific quantification of their energy-saving impact. In terms of energy security, the NECP emphasizes diversification away from Russian imports but lacks clarity on gas demand reduction strategies. While it mentions key electricity infrastructure projects, cross-border initiatives are overlooked.



Regarding energy poverty, the NECP lacks a clear definition and specific policies. The plan also falls short in setting quantified targets for research and innovation and does not comprehensively address just transition aspects. Furthermore, the NECP lacks quantification of investment needs and funding sources, and some analytical aspects remain outdated or insufficiently explained.

Overall, the updated plan indicates a formal acceptance of EU requirements but does not demonstrate a deeper commitment to or understanding of the changes needed to achieve carbon neutrality.

### Effective Environmental Health Protection

Policy Efforts  
and Commitment  
to Minimizing  
Environmental  
Health Risks  
Score: 8

International comparisons show Czechia performing worse than the OECD and EU averages in terms of fine air particulate exposure and household exposure to solid fuels. These factors position Czechia near the bottom of the table, much worse than the best-performing countries or even the average. Additionally, a higher proportion of individuals suffer from the effects of unsafe drinking water.

Air pollution has been a long-standing problem in Czechia, reflecting the country's industrial structure and reliance on heavily polluting fuel sources. Air quality is rigorously monitored through a network of stations. If concentrations exceed set thresholds for a 24-hour period, a smog situation can be declared. When this occurs, citizens are advised to take appropriate precautions based on their health status, and municipalities can impose transport restrictions. In 2023, one smog situation was declared for ozone pollution, and three were declared for particulate pollution.

Since 2004, national plans to reduce air pollution have been in place, aligning with EU legislation in recent years and periodically updated, most recently in December 2023. The report accompanying that update shows improvements across pollution indicators and that almost all targets are being met. The updated program includes commitments up to 2030, which are less demanding than the accompanying forecasts. An extensive number of specific measures are included as part of a broader State Environmental Policy. Pollution reductions will predominantly come from measures such as reducing energy use in heating, using renewable energy sources, and reducing carbon in transport. Indeed, changes in the economic structure have been the main source of reduced pollution.

Environmental policy addressing specific pollutants employs a diverse array of instruments, including direct subsidies, voluntary methods, and various monitoring techniques. These were implemented across six priorities, 14 supporting areas, and six combined areas.

An assessment updated in 2023 showed a meticulous approach to evaluation. However, several targets were not met, raising questions about the adequacy of the monitoring procedures. For instance, an initiative under the Ministry of Agriculture aimed to increase the rearing of beef cattle on pastures, supported by specific subsidies to reduce ammonia emissions, was to be accomplished by 2020. At least six agencies were involved in this initiative.

The Czech Statistical Office could provide data on the number of months pastures were used, but not the number of cattle utilizing them. They anticipated that this information would not be available until 2026. Data from the ministry was only sufficient to estimate the area of pasture used, falling short of indicating the required improvement. Consequently, a reduction in ammonia emissions could not be demonstrated, marking the program as a failure.

### Effective Ecosystem and Biodiversity Preservation

Policy Efforts  
and Commitment  
to Preserving  
Ecosystems and  
Protecting  
Biodiversity  
Score: 6

The Ministry for the Environment produced Czechia's first biodiversity strategy in 2005, shortly after the country's accession to the European Union. This strategy included objectives and indicators for monitoring results but did not allocate specific tasks. An updated strategy for 2016–2025, published in 2016, lamented the low public awareness of biodiversity issues, particularly as the overall situation continued to deteriorate, largely due to agriculture and transport activities. This indicated that the issue could not be addressed by the Ministry of the Environment alone. The Nature Conservation Agency for Czechia (Agentura ochrany přírody a krajiny ČR, AOPK ČR), established in 2015, actively monitors the country's biodiversity and administers various categories of protected territories, including 24 protected landscape areas under the IUCN category and about 8,000 other types of protected areas under IUCN Ia, III, and IV. These protected areas cover 16% of the country's area. Results have been unimpressive. Czechia scores poorly by international standards on indicators for both forest and grassland loss, and high pesticide use in agriculture poses a significant threat to wildlife, especially bird species, which have received the most public attention. While some habitats have shown improvements, overall, these efforts have not aligned with the EU biodiversity strategy for the period 2014–2020. Eighty percent of protected habitats and 70% of listed species were judged to have an “unfavorable-bad” status.

Czechia is now confronted by EU legislation requiring the formulation of a National Plan for the Renewal of Nature by 2026. This plan aims not only to protect but also to renew environments, including agricultural land and methods, with an expansion of protected landscapes to cover 20% of the surface area. This effort should involve participation from multiple ministries and public agencies, alongside NGOs. Although this has not been a major area for EU funding, one project, with a €12.2 million subsidy, will assess the needs of protected areas and develop an effective system for their coordination and management. The outline of a comprehensive policy, based on a full assessment of needs, has yet to be formulated.

### Effective Contributions to Global Environmental Protection

Policy Efforts  
and Commitment  
to a Global  
Environmental  
Policy  
Score: 4

Czechia has traditionally been a reluctant follower rather than a leader in global environmental policy. By international standards, it is a high net greenhouse gas emitter and has been among the worst donors to the Green Climate Fund, established in 2010 to help developing countries with projects to reduce carbon emissions. The Babiš government contributed nothing to the fund, arguing that Czechia was itself not a wealthy country and that it was already working on cutting its carbon emissions.

However, new Prime Minister Petr Fiala attended the COP 27 climate conference in November 2022 and pledged that, starting in 2024, Czechia would donate \$1 million annually. Although this is a modest and largely symbolic amount, it marks an improvement. If the promise is kept, Czechia would no longer be one of the few non-contributors among the world's richer countries.

In other respects, Czechia has continued to uphold its commitments as an EU member. During the 2022 Czech Presidency of the EU, the main priorities were the Fit for 55 climate package, biodiversity protection, the circular economy, and avoiding deforestation. The achievements of the Czech Presidency included the completion of negotiations on all climate components of the Fit for 55 package, the establishment of the Social Climate Fund to help households transition to modern energy, and the implementation of stricter rules for the emission allowances market and the use and recycling of batteries. Additionally, the Czech Republic will receive CZK 95 billion from the EU under the National Renewal Plan for projects aimed at improving physical infrastructure to reduce carbon emissions.

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