

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION SUMMIT UN

Outcomes of national consultations – Czech Republic

Introduction

The Czech Republic continues to put strong emphasis on the sustainable development agenda in education and considers equal access to education as its priority. This priority and the respect of the main objectives of the Sustainable Development Goal No. 4 are reflected in the strategic documents of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (hereinafter referred to as the "MEYS").

Given that the first implementation phase (2020-2023) of the Strategy of Education Policy of the Czech Republic up to 2030 ("Strategy 2030+") continues to involve the actors of the education system and relies on national consultation process and due to the compliance of the TES action tracks with the mentioned Strategy, the Czech Republic relies on the outputs of the national consultations in the reports for the Transforming Education Pre-summit and Summit.

1/ Recovery from Covid-19 disruption

The crisis associated with the covid-19 pandemic has affected the whole society, including the education sector and young people. In the Czech Republic, the personal presence of pupils at schools was prohibited as early as of 12 March 2020 and in the 2020/2021 school year. In spring 2021, it became apparent that the Czech schools could implement distance learning, nevertheless this new and sudden situation required adequate methodological, technical, financial and personnel support, which the MEYS has provided in various ways.

For our country, distance learning for such a long time and across all levels of education was a new experience. During 2020, the budget for regional education was strengthened to acquire ICT equipment to support distance learning. Extra funds for an acquisition of ICT equipment for primary and secondary schools amounted to CZK 1.3 billion. 75 000 computers for pupils and teachers were purchased. National funding was also used to provide personal support, with an allocation of 1 000 IT administrators (non-teaching staff).

In cooperation with the MEYS, many educational projects, which are still a welcome source of inspiration for distance learning, were developed. In September 2020, the MEYS issued a **Methodological Recommendation for Distance Learning**, and in March 2021, the MEYS published a **Methodology Guidance for Schools** with a focus on mental health. In the same month, a course called "Safe in Cyber!" was developed in partnership with National Cyber and Information Security Agency to explain risky behavior in cyber space.

The MEYS has supported children and youth through subsidy programs. The specific activities for 2021 were reducing the impact of the covid-19 pandemic, linking formal and non-formal education and intergenerational dialogue. The **"Together after COVID" call** focused on activities of secondary schools providing vocational education. The aim was to develop the competences needed for an active civic, professional, and personal life of pupils and to provide professional support to teaching staff in accordance with the Strategy 2030+. In 2021, 90 projects were supported. As an immediate response to covid-19 pandemic, the MEYS announced **The Summer Camps call** aimed at reducing the negative impact of the pandemic on children with compulsory school attendance in the 2020/2021 school year. The purpose of the grant was to promote the re-strengthening of social relationships with peers, skills which may have been affected by the absence of full-time education during the school year and to promote children's mental well-being and mental health. The Summer Camps took place from July to August 2021 and were free of charge.

National Recovery Plan for the Czech Republic

Following an unprecedented crisis due to the pandemic, the Government of the Czech Republic prepared the National Recovery Plan. The plan is a strong combination of reforms and investments implemented from European Recovery and Resilience Facility Fund.

The investments included in the National Recovery Plan are divided into 6 pillars. One of the pillars is Education and Labour Market. Investments are, among others, targeted at maximising benefits of the digital transformation. The plan also aims at tackling inequalities in education and investing in pre-school facilities.

Johannes Amos Comenius Programme

The Johannes Amos Comenius Programme (P JAC) for the period 2021-2027, approved on 9 June 2022 by the European Commission, is aimed to support the development of an open and educated society based on knowledge and skills, equal opportunities and developing the potential of everyone. The programme has two main priorities: research and development, education.

Methodological support and research survey of the effects of the pandemic

In March 2021, the MEYS in cooperation with the Czech School Inspectorate (CSI) and the National Pedagogical Institute, prepared and issued a detailed methodological document providing schools with pedagogical topics and recommendations for the period of pupils' return to full-time teaching. At the same time, the CSI prepared a survey focused on monitoring the procedures and approaches of schools after pupils' return to full-time school attendance.

The chosen strategic measures are:

- to systematically reduce inequalities in access to education, whether due to material, technical, personnel or socio-economic causes,
- to focus education on the acquisition of key competencies, incl. digital competences, both for pupils and students and for teachers,
- to focus on the content of education for life and competitiveness – revise outdated curricula and teaching methods, move towards modern knowledge and practical applicability (in the labour market, in personal and civic life),
- to ensure the individualization of education from pre-school level onwards – to help children experience success, to support their needs and talents through early diagnostics and to help develop them more through various methods,
- to enable to effectively combine full-time teaching with elements of online education
- to expand cooperation and communication with families, involve schools and non-profit organizations in the process of activation and support the involvement of all children in education and field work with appropriate incentives,
- to prepare system support for school founders, schools and the teachers themselves.

2/Transforming education

In the Czech Republic, the first implementation period (2020-2023) of **Strategy 2030+** is currently in progress. Strategy 2030+, approved on 19 October 2020 by the Government of the Czech Republic, focuses on sustainable development competences, elimination of inequalities, access to quality education, support for teachers, digital literacy and on ensuring stable funding.

The preparation of this strategic document was based on maximum openness and transparency and took place across all regions of the Czech Republic. As part of the preparation of the Strategy 2030+,

the Minister of Education, Youth and Sports appointed an expert working group of stakeholders in the field of education. The group's task was to create priorities for the development of the so-called Guidelines for Education Policy. Afterwards, there were public discussions, conferences and consultations that involved the widest range of education policy stakeholders possible with the aim to ensure that both professionals and public had the opportunity to actively influence the preparation process. There were more than 1 000 direct participants (academics, experts, teachers, school founders as well as parents and youth) in round tables and conferences and more than 8 000 online views.

The Strategy 2030+ will be implemented within three periods that will lead to the creation and development of an open education system which will respond to the ever-changing external environment and provide relevant educational content over a lifelong perspective.

The first implementation period (2020 – 2023) is currently in progress and involves a public participation. Currently the priority of MEYS is to introduce revised curricula which would reflect the needs of the 21st century. Document for the second implementation period, that will introduce new set of measures, is currently prepared.

Furthermore, the MEYS closely cooperates with the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic, which supports research, experimental development, and innovation. The MEYS assigns research needs for medium and long-term goals and thus obtains analytical data and data for evidence-informed decision-making.

The MEYS applies the principles of project management within the implementation of education policy. It implements changes, modernization and innovation through projects and pilot verifications and regularly monitors and evaluates projects.

3/Review of national education targets and benchmarks

Estimated national benchmark values for the Czech Republic for periods 2025 and 2030 were submitted to UNESCO Technical Cooperation Group.

Especially the indicators 4.1.1 and 4.2.2 are in accordance with the ambitions and objectives of the Strategy 2030+. Completion rates at given levels of education in the Czech Republic are generally very high (indicator 4.1.2.).

As for the indicator *Gender gap in upper secondary completion rate*, both girls and boys have the same conditions for access to education. For several indicator, the Czech Republic has not collected enough data yet.

To sum up, the most important indicators for the Czech Republic are those that are in accordance with the Strategy 2030+, because they are the most relevant for our context and are, among other, a result of national consultations.

4/Ensuring sustainable public funding

Increasement of funding and ensuring its stability is an integral part of the Czech strategic documents through all levels of education. Between 2012 and 2018, the proportion of government expenditure devoted to education was notably increased in the Czech Republic. Public spending remains the main source of funding of education. Needless to say, the division of responsibility for education funding between levels of government (central, regional and local) is also an important factor in education policy and central government has to motivate local governments to invest in education of their local community.

For the strategic objectives to be met in 2021, an increase in financing of the education system was up to 1 percentage point in comparison to 2017 (+55 % in nominal; +69 % compared to the year 2015) and the actual Policy Statement of the Government states that the Government has an important task of obtaining more funding for education so that public expenditure on education and school services in relation to GDP corresponds to the OECD average level at least. It is also worth mentioning, that the Government in its Policy Statement guarantees an adequate remuneration of pedagogical workers, so to keep their salaries at the level of 130 % of the average gross monthly salary in national economy. The Government puts emphasis on maintaining a 20 % (that was reached in 2021; +121 % in nominal compared to year 2017) share of above-flat-rate salary components and the effective use thereof.

Sustainability is the crucial question of the Czech public administration, because there is more than 6 250 self-governing municipalities (90 % with less than 2 000 inhabitants) and nearly 10 000 schools (more than 70 % of them founded on the municipal level). This fact makes it slightly difficult to concentrate resources.