

## 8. School-to-work transition in Czechia: integration of a majority, marginalization of some

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the recent developments of the transition of young people to the labour market in Czechia and the role of government policies. As in the other national chapters, we address the situation of people aged 15–29 years, and we try to cover mainly the newest development (using literature and data sources from recent years, with a focus on the 2018–2020 period). The aim of the chapter is twofold: to provide insight into the situation of young people in Czechia and to provide a solid base for comparative work concerning transition regimes in Eastern Europe.

In this chapter, we address the following aspects. First, we discuss the broad economic environment and the structures and segmentation of the labour market. Next, we discuss education and active labour market policies for young people. Then we focus on cultural factors that influence the situation of young people in the labour market. Finally, we conclude and discuss the findings.

### 2. BROAD ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

In the period after the 2008/2009 crisis, the economic situation in Czechia has been driven by a long-lasting growth since 2014 that led to a substantial decrease in unemployment, including unemployment of young people. The crisis brought a drop in GDP of almost 5 percent in 2009, a temporary recovery in 2010 and 2011, and a slight recession again in 2012 and 2013. Economic recovery in 2014 and stable growth in 2015–2018 followed, accompanied by a low inflation rate, moderate real wage growth, steady employment growth

Table 8.1 Economic and Labour Market Developments 2008–2018

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Real GDP Growth (%)	2.7	-4.8	2.3	1.8	-0.8	-0.5	2.7	5.3	2.5	4.4	2.8
Number of employed (primary job) (growth in %)	1.6	-1.4	-1.0	-0.3	0.4	1.0	0.8	1.4	1.9	1.6	1.4
Unemployment rate	4.4	6.7	7.3	6.7	7.0	7.0	6.1	5.0	4.0	2.9	2.2
LTU rate	2.2	2.0	3.0	2.7	3.0	3.0	2.7	2.4	1.7	1.0	0.7
Unemployment rate 15–24	9.9	16.6	18.3	18.1	19.5	19.0	15.9	12.6	10.5	7.9	6.7
Unemployment rate 15–29	6.4	11.6	13.0	11.8	13.1	12.3	10.7	9.0	7.4	5.1	4.4
Real wages growth (%)	1.4	2.3	0.7	0.6	-0.8	-1.5	2.5	2.9	3.7	4.2	5.3
Inflation rate	6.3	1.0	1.5	1.9	3.3	1.4	0.4	0.3	0.7	2.1	2.8
Government deficit (% of GDP)	-2.0	-5.5	-4.2	-2.7	-3.9	-1.2	-2.1	-0.6	0.7	1.6	1.1
Gross public debt (% of GDP)	28.3	33.6	37.4	39.8	44.5	44.9	42.2	40.0	36.8	34.7	32.6

Source: Czech Statistical Office.

and decreasing unemployment rate, including youth unemployment (see Table 8.1).

The country is converging with more developed EU economies: it achieved 88 percent of EU average GDP per capita in 2017. Investments have been the main driver of economic growth, both public investments financed by the EU and private investments, supported by rising profits and credit, together with stronger household consumption boosted by rising wages and employment (OECD, 2018). Manufacturing production led to the recovery, rising between 2010 and 2018 by 40 percent.

Due to the decrease in unemployment and employment growth in 2017–2018, the labour shortages were clear and represented a limit to economic growth. In the long run, because of population ageing, public spending on pensions and healthcare represents a challenge (OECD, 2018). There is a significant

productivity gap between large and small enterprises, particularly in manufacturing, while promotion and support to enterprise remains low. In 2017, the labour productivity of large enterprises was around 66 percent higher than micro-enterprises (down from 80 percent in 2014), and around 25 percent higher than small enterprises (35 percent in 2014) (European Commission, 2020).

Czechia represents an open economy: exports in value-added contribute to about 45 percent of GDP. However, this also means that the economy is particularly exposed to trade disruptions. Most exports (nearly two-thirds) flow to a few countries, about one third to Germany, and the other third to Slovakia, Poland, the UK, France, Italy, Austria (OECD, 2018).

A substantial share of manufacturing and construction compared to services represents the specific feature of the economy. The value-added of the secondary sector to GDP is the highest in Europe: it was 37.6 percent in 2017, while the average of the EU-28 was 24.7 percent (ČSÚ, 2018). Similarly, employment structure is characterized by an extraordinarily high share of manufacturing and construction but a lower share of services, without much change over time: in 2018, manufacturing represented 27.5 percent of total employment (25.4 percent in 2010) and construction 7.3 percent (9.5 percent in 2010). Sectors like public administration and defence, and education, human health and social services represent between 6 and 7 percent in both sectors in the long run.

### 3. LABOUR MARKET STRUCTURE AND SEGMENTATION

In this section, we try to identify features of the labour market relating to the chance of young people to secure a ‘core position’ in the labour market. We consider the labour market inclusive when young people are not disproportionately more at risk of a long-term marginalization and a vulnerable labour market position. Inclusiveness contrasts with the long-term prevalence of marginalized status – work-welfare cycling (see the framework in McTier and McGregor, 2018). We also discuss some factors that contribute to the specific development in Czechia, including the level of skills of young people, the economic situation, and the role of employment protection

#### 3.1 General Situation and Macro-Factors

The chances of young people on the labour market are highly related to the economic cycle and the demand for workers (Mlynářová and Spáčil, 2016; NÚV, 2017; 2018; 2019a). Age (because of participation in education), gender (due to care for children), and the level of education, affect the level

of employment of young people (see Tables 4.18, 4.24 in ČSÚ, 2019c). The economic situation in Czechia has been driven by a long-lasting boom that led to a substantial decrease in young people's unemployment since 2013–2014 (see Table 8.1). According to MPSV (2019c, pp. 20), the number of unemployed people in a specific category of school graduates and people up to 20 years decreased from 22,000 in December 2015 to 10,000 in December 2018. The labour market situation of the Czech youth was better than in the EU on average.

There are, however, striking differences in unemployment level among educational levels and gender. Low-skilled young people's unemployment risk is almost four times higher (18.9 percent in 2018) than those with secondary and tertiary education (5 and 3.9 percent). Similarly, the unemployment rates of young women are about twice as high compared to young men, while the EU average is much more balanced (data by Eurostat). The human and social capital deficit is the clearest in the Roma ethnic minority, which is also discriminated against in the job market (Hora, 2021).

Demographic factors contribute to lowering competition among workers. Mlynářová and Spáčil (2016) and NÚV (2017; 2018) illustrated that the number of young people and school graduates decreased substantially both absolutely and relatively compared to older cohorts. Economic activity also declined, especially for young people aged 15–24, as young people enter the labour market older than the preceding age cohorts. Young people have better chances of choosing schools (including university-level schools) and finding jobs. Most young people from demographically weak cohorts are quickly integrated into the labour market, leading to a dramatic decrease in the number of young unemployed people (see ČSÚ, 2019c, Table 2.29).

Another related issue is the low participation of women with young children in employment. The child employment penalty (the difference in the employment rate of women aged 20–49 with children aged 0–6 years and women without children) was 42.9 percentage points in 2017. Traditional preferences, gender roles division within society, and extended parental leave and lack of childcare facilities may explain such a prominent figure.

### **3.2 Inclusiveness of the Labour Market and Position of Youth**

Kopáček and Horáková (2018) conducted a regional study of Visegrad group countries (Czechia, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary) using a composite indicator of the situation of youth in the labour market (including school dropout, employment, unemployment, NEET levels and working hours). They found that young people in Czechia are in the best position (lowest level of NEET and unemployment rate etc.) of the countries compared. The exception was the west-north Bohemia region, which suffers from typical structural problems

and where most of the low-skilled people live (see Bičáková and Kalíšková, 2018).

The transition to the labour market is becoming more extended and less transparent (NÚV, 2018). Young people were traditionally unemployed due to a lack of practical work experience. Nowadays, many young people work during their education, including jobs unrelated to their studies (NÚV, 2019a). Working may help to increase their chances in the labour market (for example, gaining experience and contacts), but it can also lead to low school attention and subsequent school dropout (NÚV, 2018; NÚV, 2019a). Young people are often not interested in internships because they are unpaid (see Mlynářová and Spáčil, 2016).

The level of education causes differences in opportunities. According to Eurostat, Czech university graduates are among the most successful in finding jobs where 98 percent of men and 87 percent of women could find employment three years after graduation. Czechia has the highest share of young people with a vocational education (NÚV, 2017). However, the results of the NÚV (2018) survey for vocational and high school graduates showed young people do not profit so much from this education. In fact, 30.8 percent of young people with vocational training did not start a stable work activity after three years of finishing school. Only a minority of young people remained working in fields they originally studied (NÚV, 2018; NÚV 2019a). Two key factors contributing to this problem are: poor pay and working conditions in jobs related to the studied area and better job offers in other fields and low availability of jobs in the studied area (see Svobodová, 2018; NÚV, 2019a). People who graduated in some fields (for example, textile industry, wood crafting, personal services) more frequently change their profession (because of a high level of unemployment in these sectors). However, most young people believe their job corresponds to their level of education (NÚV, 2019a).

The major risk group for (long-term) unemployment comprises young people without education or with only elementary education, including early school leavers and people who dropped out (Mlynářová and Spáčil, 2016; NÚV, 2018; Bičáková and Kalíšková, 2018). Although statistics about ethnicity are not available, we may expect a disproportionately higher representation of young Roma among early school leavers. There was a growth of low-skilled among young people aged 18–24 in recent years (Bičáková and Kalíšková, 2018). Young people who were low educated and did not study exhibited a high level of (long-term) unemployment, a high level of economic inactivity, and a very low level of employment (see Bičáková and Kalíšková, 2018). The specific unemployment rate in this group was high, approximately 30 percent in the age category 15–29 in 2016 (NÚV, 2018).

Another risk group comprises disabled people (often with a low level of education – Bičáková and Kalíšková, 2018) and people with specific education

needs who can complete the second level of education (NÚV, 2018; NÚV, 2019a). In 2018 ČSÚ (2019d) conducted a unique representative survey of disabled people. Young people with disabilities (65,000) made up about 3 percent of the population aged 15–34 years (about half were born with a disability). They are often less able to complete secondary or university education, but they often gain vocational training. About 40 percent of this youth felt limited in getting the education they wanted, and 42 percent felt their chances of getting and holding a job were limited.

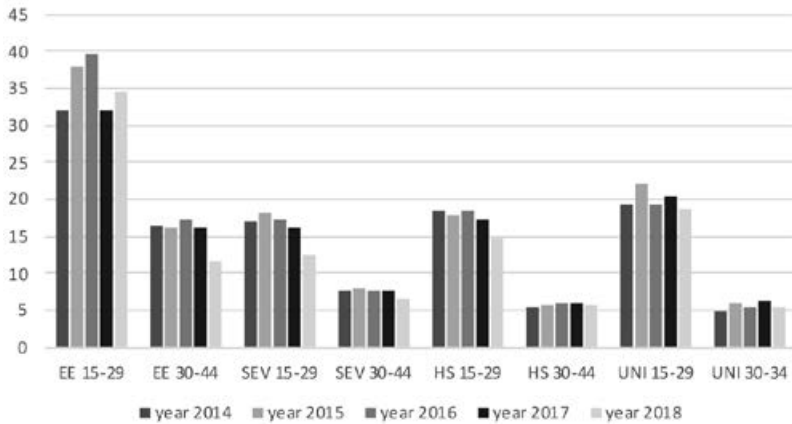
Young people were satisfied with their job security (NÚV, 2019a). However, this may not be true for the segment of low-educated (see Hora, 2021). Another discussed problem is job-hopping (having two or more jobs in three years). Job-hopping is related to a better offer (upward path), working during studies, and insecure jobs in the secondary labour market (NÚV, 2019a). NUV (2019a) showed that about 20 percent of vocational school graduates and 30 percent of high school graduates worked in over two jobs in three years. Most young people leave their jobs because of their own decision.

### 3.3 Employment Protection

Another vital issue for the inclusiveness of the labour market is the level of employment protection. The political representation made the labour market more flexible by the reforms implemented in 2012 with minimal later changes (see Hora et al., 2016).

Temporary contracts are allowed for a maximum of three years with prolongation twice (nine years total). Temporary contracts are rarely used in the Czech labour market, but with significant differences between age and education groups. Compared internationally, the share of temporary contracts is at an average level (see ČSÚ, 2019c, Table 4.22). However, only one quarter to one-half of people aged 30–44 work on temporary contracts. Data show that the highest percentage of young people working on temporary contracts is among those with the lowest level of education (see Figure 8.1 and Bičáková and Kalíšková, 2018) followed by university graduates. The share of temporary contracts has been relatively stable in the last ten years (see Hora et al., 2016, graph 2.1). The inevitable problem is that some undeclared and semi-formal jobs are probably not included in these statistics.

Temporary contracts can make up a substantial part of job offers for young people. When employers specify the type of contract in announcements, about 40 percent are temporary contracts (NÚV, 2018). Temporary contracts are typically short. According to labour force survey data for 2018 (ČSÚ, 2019b), only 3.5 percent of employees work on temporary contracts for over one year. The Czech labour market is tight. Thus, firms competing for employees offer permanent contracts. In the current situation, flexible contracts can be



Note: Labour Force Survey data published by CZSO (see ČSÚ, 2019b).

Figure 8.1 Share of young and middle-aged people working on temporary contracts by education level

a disadvantage for employers because they allow employees to leave jobs quickly (Kyzlinková et al., 2018).

Young people have substantially lower wages, and the highest share of them work for a minimum wage (Mlynářová and Spáčil, 2016). However, the wages of low-skilled young people are higher than the wages of low-skilled people in older cohorts (Bičáková and Kališková, 2018). The minimum wage was increased several times in recent years – from 9,500 CZK (350 EUR) in 2015 to 14,600 (555 EUR) in January 2020 (see Bičáková and Kališková, 2018), but Grossman et al. (2019) have shown that this increase did not affect unemployment. Severance payments are probably not very accessible to young people. Severance payments are provided only for permanent contracts in cases of reorganization or redundancy. Severance payments are one to three months' salaries depending on the length of previous employment (see Hora et al., 2016).

Work contracts for minor work and agency work are allowed in Czechia. A part-time job is often taken up in Czechia, but young people and women more often work under such contracts, usually voluntarily (see ČSÚ 2019c, Table 4.25). While a standard employment contract is preferred in legislation, two types of work contracts are allowed for small jobs ('agreement on doing work task' for irregular tasks and 'agreement on work activity' for regular small work activity). These are not employment contracts and provide a lower level of employment and social protection (the level of social security depends on the level of wage). However, their usage is limited to occasional/low scope work. Their significance

as the primary/only source of income is low (see Kyzlinková et al., 2018; MPSV, 2020), but they are widely used for supplementary income. According to MPSV (2020), of 220,500 people working on agreements, 40,000 people have no other income, and an additional 37,000 are students. The conditions for agency work were made stricter and ensured equal work conditions in 2017. Usually, agencies employ foreigners. The controls of the agencies show many problems in insufficient documentation and unequal working conditions (see SUIP, 2019).

There is a concern that employers use bogus work – self-employment instead of an employment contract – to gain more flexibility and avoid social security contributions (Kyzlinková et al., 2018). This disguised legal contract is not lawful (see Jouza, 2017) but is nonetheless widely realized (Kyzlinková et al., 2018). According to estimates, 100,000 to 200,000 people may work in this type of relationship (see SUIP, 2019). No statistics distinguish deceived employment from genuine self-employment. Bogus workers may be hidden among 214,000 of young self-employed to 30 years old (MIT, 2022), but precise estimates are difficult. However, we can see that the share of self-employed is surprisingly high in some sectors (see ČSÚ, 2019b).

Some forms of work may avoid the standard legislative rules related to employment contracts: paying taxes, having set working hours and remuneration, security of the agreement, etc. (see Kyzlinková et al., 2018). Kyzlinková et al. (2018) document that these are over proportionately young people willing to accept such practices.

#### 4. EDUCATION SYSTEM AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

In Czechia, the education system is based on a long tradition with a strong emphasis on vocational education rather than general education. This is the consequence of the long-standing historical and cultural development, as well as the communist period of history in Czechia. There is a strong path dependency in objectives, teaching methods, and social appreciation of the teaching profession. Although there have been some partial changes during the last five years and the widespread systematic change of education is discussed, key challenges for the Czech education system persist: significant underfinancing of the system, poor quality, weak links between education and the labour market, less flexibility, and strong selectivity (Hora, Horáková & Sirovátka, 2019a).

In some respects, the Czech education system is like education systems in the other transitional countries (Hora, Horáková & Sirovátka, 2019a). There are preschools that are available for 3–6 years of age and are guaranteed for children in their last year before entering elementary school. Compulsory elementary education takes nine years (usually from the ages of 6 to 15).



Czech elementary education is relatively uniform although it allows children to attend some different schools or type of education programmes (for example, six- or eight-year gymnasiums, eight-year conservatories or special schools for children with disabilities). It is divided into two stages: primary stage (grades 1–5) and lower secondary stage (grades 6–9). The output of elementary education is the ISCED 2 level of education, which is the last level of education for only 5 percent to 6 percent of Czech youth (OECD, 2019a).

Upper secondary education can be general or vocational and is four years (grades 10–13). Although it is not considered mandatory, approximately 91 percent of the population aged 15–19 years is enrolled in upper secondary education compared to the OECD average of 84 percent (OECD, 2019a). At this level, vocational education is much more common than general secondary education in a ratio of 75 percent to 25 percent (ČŠI, 2019). Students who graduate with the vocational certificate (about two-thirds of graduates every year) rarely continue into tertiary education.

In Czechia, there are no formal obstacles to choosing a field of study in upper secondary and tertiary levels of education. There are significant differences between males and females in their study preferences. For example, in the technical sciences, the predominance of men is typical compared to the majority of women in the social sciences. Currently, women are twice as likely as men to achieve the secondary level of education and three times as likely to transition between secondary and higher education (Matějů et al., 2013).

Every graduate who passes the final exam at the upper secondary level of education (ISCED 3) and successfully passes the entrance exam may study at the tertiary level of education. Most colleges and universities offer accredited bachelor's (three-year) and master's (continuing two-year or separate five-year) study programmes. Some of them are also eligible to offer a doctorate (usually four-year) study programme. Studying at public universities is free (<https://regvssp.msmt.cz/registrvssp/>, ČSÚ, 2020). The share of the young population included in tertiary education, as well as the share of population with the level of education of ISCED 5–8 is increasing but not sufficient yet (in 2019 there were 33 percent of people aged 25–34 years with tertiary education in Czechia compared to the average of 45 percent in OECD countries, OECD, 2020). From a gender perspective, younger women are more likely than younger men to achieve tertiary education: in 2019, 39 percent of 25–34-year-old women had a tertiary degree compared to 26 percent of their male peers (average across OECD countries is 51 percent of women to 39 percent of men (OECD, 2020).

As distinguished in theory (Walther, 2006; Raffé, 2011; Lundahl, 2011), some characteristics of the education system are important: the standardization of educational provision, the degree of vocational/occupation specificity, and the stratification of educational opportunity. In Czechia, the dimension of quality and the level of system development are also worth considering.

The degree of standardization of education entails the extent to which there is a nationwide uniformity in schooling quality standards (Walther, 2006). These standards are recognized on the level of educational input (curriculum and learning goals and standards for individual levels and forms of education) as well as output (formal requirements for individual qualification and/or profession). In Czechia, learning content is defined as a two-stage curriculum: general (national) and school-specific education curriculum. For a long time, the Czech education curriculum has been criticized because of its obsolescence and over-fullness not corresponding to the actual needs of the labour market and the civic society (EDUin, 2019). This is reflected in the stagnating or worsening results of Czech pupils and students in international comparison (TIMMS, PISA, PIRLS) (Prokop & Dvořák, 2019). Therefore, the revision of existing education curricula started in 2016 to reduce the extent of mandatory learning, refine and update expected educational outcomes, and make education more relevant to the individual needs of children (MŠMT, 2020).

Evaluation methods are summative rather than formative and poorly understood by children, which is another attribute of standardization in education (ČŠI, 2019). Standardization (of output) has been strengthened in recent years by establishing some uniform rules for the graduation exam or the entrance exam for upper secondary schools.

According to Tählin (2007) the degree of standardization of educational opportunities shows that educational degrees at various levels provide reliable signals to employers of the holder's productive capacity. Regarding this assumption, implementation of the National Qualification Framework and the National Occupation Framework since 2007 is important in Czechia (both under the European Qualification Framework). In 2018, 1,253 professional qualifications and 22,184 tests for professional qualifications were listed (MŠMT, 2019b).

The features of the Czech education system imply a strong path dependence, especially with regard to its objectives and teaching methods. Despite the proclaimed efforts for a comprehensive reform of education, there are only partial changes (i.e. definition of key competencies of pupils, integration of the content of subjects, introduction of school-based curriculum in 2006 and planned subject-based curriculum, etc.). The Czech education system is strongly decentralized, with educational institutions having high autonomy, both in creating educational programmes and in financing or personnel issues. The degree of vocational specificity refers to the association between education and occupation. The proportion of Czech young people studying vocational/occupational programmes is one of the highest in the EU, with similar values found in Belgium and Switzerland (OECD, 2019a). This is not common among CEE countries and can be explained mainly by the negligible differences between general and vocational education in Czechia. The system of vocational education is characterized by a formal curric-

ulum, school-based training, and rather general skills which are provided by the schools (a second chance for students who failed upper secondary education).

Although vocational education in Czechia is widespread, there has been a slightly decreasing emphasis on vocational education over the last 12 years. This results from the demographic decline in this age cohort, as well as the changing preferences of Czech young people, who increasingly want to continue their studies at universities. However, because of the low flexibility of the education system, graduates of secondary vocational schools have only limited opportunities to study at the tertiary level of education (EDUin, 2014).<sup>1</sup>

The degree of stratification of the education system refers to the form of tracking at secondary schooling level (Walther, 2006). A high degree of tracking implies that students are separated into vocational and academic tracks upon entering secondary schools, with only little mobility between tracks (Tählén, 2007). The Czech education system is strongly stratified, with early tracking being achieved in 11–13-year-old children who enter perennial gymnasiums or in 14–15-year-old children who enter upper secondary schools. Such early tracking (among 11-year-old children) is not common in the other European countries. It means that Czech parents are much more involved in decisions about their children's educational pathways (MŠMT, 2020; Prokop & Dvořák, 2019). Inequalities in the Czech education system are among the highest in the EU member states.

The socioeconomic status of families explains 40–45 percent of the variance in results of Czech children in tests for mathematics, reading, and science literacy compared to 30 percent standard differences in other European countries (OECD, 2015). This socioeconomic disadvantage is often associated with ethnicity. Among other things, the high degree of selectivity in Czech education is reflected in the continuing existence of segregated schools with a majority or over one third of Roma children (MŠMT, 2020).

In addition, different educational outcomes are influenced by strong imbalances in education quality between Czech regions and within them. Karlovarský and Ústecký regions are doing the worst because of a large share of families with low socioeconomic status, on the one hand and the lack of interest of junior teachers to work in these regions, on the other (Prokop & Dvořák, 2019; ČŠI, 2019; MŠMT, 2020; MŠMT, 2019a). This results in a lower quality of education and worsening opportunities for young people to study at higher levels of education, as well as to take part in the labour market. The family and the municipality where the Czech child is born significantly affect their educational and life chances.

In relation to stratification and inequalities in Czech education, the role of perennial gymnasiums is often discussed. These schools negatively affect equal opportunities in education in two ways. They select children from a favourable socio-economic environment (15–25 percent every year) rather than unusually talented children (2–4 percent, MŠMT, 2020; MŠMT, 2019a). Children with better prospects enter perennial gymnasiums with the perspective of studying at

university, while the others remain in elementary schools with fewer perspectives for further learning. The quality of education in the lower secondary stage of elementary schools is decreasing (EDUin, 2019).

The problem of the growing number of dropouts is the third problem related to the strong stratification of the Czech education system. The rate of early leavers is relatively low compared to the average of EU countries. However, the number of dropouts has been growing in Czechia during the last ten years with the increasing imbalances between regions.

The lowest share of dropouts was in 2011 (5 percent); since then the rate has grown, with a present value of almost 7 percent in 2018 (Eurostat, 2019). These are not only young people from disadvantaged and unsuitable family backgrounds but also a relatively new group of young people who failed to complete vocational upper secondary education ([www.infoabsolvent.cz](http://www.infoabsolvent.cz)).

The degree of development and the quality of the education system are specific characteristics that affect the smooth transitions of young people from education to the labour market. The key issue here is that education is permanently under-funded. In 2016, total education spending in Czechia was 3.5 percent of GDP, while the OECD average was 5 percent of GDP (OECD, 2019a).

The underfunding of the education system is clear in the lagging wages and salaries of teachers at all school levels. Teachers in regional education (primary to secondary education, ISCED 1–3) earn on average 21 percent less compared to other tertiary educated persons (MŠMT, 2020) and it has only been improving slowly over the last three years. There is no career system that stimulates and appreciates the quality of the work of the teacher.

The teaching profession has a low prestige in Czechia. The teaching staff is getting older and there is only a small group of young graduates who can replace them.

## 5. VOCATIONAL TRAINING SYSTEM (VET)

Vocational education and training play a key role in the Czech education system. Although the share of students in vocational education is high (relatively close to countries such as Switzerland, Belgium or Austria), its setting and character differ from those countries. It corresponds to the first type of VET system distinguished by Eichhorst et al. (2015), i.e. education is organized in vocational and technical secondary schools. This form of VET is rather school-based and follows a formal curriculum that combines general and occupation-specific knowledge. The second type of VET according to the Eichhorst et al. (2015) typology is formal apprenticeship with institutional instruction complementing workplace training. The last model of VET is presented by the dual system typical in countries such as Germany, Austria or Switzerland. This model is characterized by the strong relationships between the education system and the labour market (VET is adapted

to meet the requirements of employers complying with technical standards for training and with social partners invited to develop and maintain curricula as well as monitor educational outcomes (Eichhorst et al., 2015).

In Czechia, vocational education is a large part of upper secondary education, with an emphasis placed on more general skills and knowledge (from 50 percent to 70 percent of educational content, MŠMT, 2008). The share of occupation-specific knowledge is higher (70–80 percent) in three-year secondary vocational schools (close to Eichhorst et al.'s [2015] model of formal apprenticeships) completed with the vocational-specific certificate (MŠMT, 2008). There is no dual system of apprenticeships in Czechia in the sense of Eichhorst et al.'s (2015) typology: on average, in vocational education, only about a fifth of the courses conducted practical training in the workplace of the school's partner employers during the school year 2018/2019 (ČŠI, 2019).

Employers' participation in the development of educational curriculum in vocational education is limited, as well as their participation in on-the-job training. However, in the last five years, the situation has gradually improved: for example, employers offer opportunities for practical training inside companies, scholarships for students, and internships, as well as various educational opportunities for teachers (ČŠI, 2019). They are also involved in the creation of the National Qualification Framework, which contributes to the definition of the key competencies of vocational graduates.

Some young people prefer to study in vocational education programmes as it facilitates earlier entry into the labour market (Eichhorst et al., 2015). On the other hand, some empirical studies show that the insufficient supply of opportunities for general education at the upper secondary level in Czechia may drive some young people onto the vocational path involuntarily (Münich & Korbel, 2021; Santiago et al., 2012).

## 6. YOUTH PROGRAMMES

### 6.1 Overall Frame

The Czech active labour market policy/ALMP is less developed compared to OECD countries on average. Gallie (2013) clustered post-communist countries into the transitional labour market 'regime' that appeared as an extreme version of the sub-protective regime. Hora, Horáková & Sirovátka (2019b) documented that a 'transitional labour market regime' is characterized by a limited scope of ALMP measures: expenditures on ALMP measures per 1 percent, unemployment was at most 0.05 percent of GDP in 2017. Expenditure on ALMP (job mediation and other PES services) was below the OECD average of 0.52 percent in Czechia (0.43 percent of GDP). Similarly, the number of ALMP participants as a percentage of the labour force was lower in Czechia (1.31 percent) compared to the OECD

average (3.81 percent) (OECD, 2019b). The major portion (between 57 to 90 percent during 2011–2018) of ALMP measures was financed from ESF resources, including the measures for the youth (MPSV, 2019d).

## 6.2 Measures for the Youth

Adapting Bonoli's (2010) typology we distinguish here four types of ALMP measures: i) incentive reinforcement (positive and negative incentives to work which may be provided with the help of positive and negative sanctions either financial or other), ii) employment assistance (facilitating (re)entry to the labour market, which may be provided with the help of job or hiring subsidies in the open labour market, job mediation and counselling), iii) occupation (providing opportunity for activity with the help of job creation in the public sector or sheltered jobs), and iv) upskilling (human capital formation, vocational training, re-qualifications). The first category, incentivizing the unemployed which comprises various types of sanctions, is not analyzed here because there are no specific positive or negative financial incentives provided to the unemployed. Indeed, because young people have no or only weak entitlements in both unemployment benefit/UB and social assistance/SA scheme (Hora, Horáková & Sirovátka 2019b, see also the section on cultural factors), there are implicitly negative incentives in play in their case.

Thus, we analyse ALMP measures as distinguished in statistics into three categories: i) employment assistance (private sector job/hiring subsidies, start-up incentives), ii) direct job creation (public works, sheltered jobs), iii) upskilling (vocational training, re-qualifications). We know that for category i) not only do the numbers of jobs/participants in subsidized jobs play a role, but also the mediation and counselling of the jobs.

In Czechia, career guidance and counselling is broken down into two elements. The first is within the competence of the Ministry of Education and is understood as part of the educational curriculum of schools at all levels of education. In this sense, counselling helps prevent and address school problems (school grades, risk behaviour) and school failure (early school leaving). The second form of counselling is in the competence of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and works as a tool for active labour market policy. There are Information and Counselling Centres established at employment offices which cooperate with schools, and their key role is to advise pupils, students, and new graduates in the choice of educational path and occupation. Sometimes, these forms of counselling merge and are realized by the same actors/people (NÚV, 2019). Career counselling is more common in elementary schools where it is compulsory (Kolektiv, 2019) than in higher levels of education where only a small minority of students use it according to their perceived needs (see Hloušková, 2018). Although the counselling system is well established in Czechia and works well (Šojdrová et al., 2014), there are some specific doubts about its effectiveness: locally diversified capacities, absence

of specialists in schools, financial problems and understaffing, insufficient diagnostics, insufficient cooperation between schools and labour market institutions, and lack of evaluation (Šojdrová et al., 2014; Ehlová, 2016; Maříková et al., 2013; Hloušková, 2018). Regarding job mediation and counselling activities, it may be documented with indications such as clients/front-line-staff workloads, and others. Sirovátka et al. (2019) reported an average of 122 job seekers per front-line worker in 2018, which is a significant improvement since 2015 when it was 311 job seekers. However, some regions still had about 180–190 job seekers per mediator in 2018. This figure is relatively good; the other problem, however, is the overloading of front-line staff by administrative work (interviews at employment offices).

Regarding the ALMP measures in focus, the Eurostat database provides us with data on the activation rates of registered unemployed in the above measures for youth under 25 years of age and the group 25 and older (see Table 8.2).

Activation rates of young people under 25 years of age increased considerably during the period of 2009–2018, from about 5 percent to 15 percent, more than it increased with the group over 25, where they increased from 5 percent to 10 percent. The activation rates at the end of the period are similar to Germany, where they were stable – around 15 percent during the period – while in Bulgaria and Poland the activation rates were mostly higher and peaked in some years at 23 percent (Poland) and 35 percent (Bulgaria). This increase was to a great extent thanks to the ESF financed ALMP measures enhanced with the Youth Guarantee scheme. The major part represents employment assistance measures, which increased the most in scope. Direct job creation is a much less emphasized category (below 3 percent activation rate), however the least emphasis is put on upskilling (about 0.5 percent activation rate in the long term with some increases to 1 percent). A similar pattern of ALMP measures is also apparent for the group above 25 years of age. However, the occupation category is stronger in this case, comparable with employment assistance, while upskilling is a similarly weak measure. Overall, the weak emphasis on upskilling may be considered the most obvious feature and weakness of the employment strategy. The increase of participation rates of young people (overall, and in the employment incentives category) between 2014 and 2018 is because of the professional traineeship scheme implemented under Youth Guarantee (see below) and, second, due to decreasing youth unemployment rates.

Thanks to the analysis by Hora et al. (2018), evidence exists of the effectiveness of the above programmes, based on estimated net effects with the use of a quasi-experimental approach with control groups (coerced exact matching). The value added of the various categories of unemployed taking part in the programmes varies. With the professional traineeship measure for youth (below 30 years) implemented under the Youth Guarantee programme for long-term unemployed youth, the net employment effect was more than twice as strong as that for the short-term unemployed youth after two years or more.

Table 8.2 Activation rates (labour market policy participants) in percent of registered unemployed in 2009–2018

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Unemployed under 25 years											
i) employment incentives (hiring subsidies)	2.1	2	0.9	:	:	5.7	9.5	8.0	9.8	12	3.9
i) start-up incentives	:	:	:	0.5	:	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.3
ii) direct job creation	1.9	1.9	1.4	0.7	1.8	2	2.6	2.7	2.4	2	1.4
iii) supported work and rehabilitation	0.2	0.3	0.3	0	0	0	0	0	0.1	0.1	0
iii) upskilling (vocational training)	0.8	1.1	0.9	0.4	0.5	0.5	2.3	:	0.5	0.4	0.2
Total	5	5.3	3.5	2.8	4.7	8.5	14.9	11.4	13.3	14.8	5.8
Unemployed 25 years and older											
i) employment incentives (hiring subsidies)	1.3	1.3	0.6	:	:	3.6	4.5	3.7	3.8	4.6	3.0
i) start-up incentives	:	:	:	0.7	:	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.4
ii) direct job creation	2.4	2.4	1.8	1.4	2.7	2.9	3.6	4.0	4.2	4.3	3.1
ii) supported work and rehabilitation	0.3	0.3	0.4	0	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.5
iii) upskilling (vocational training)	1	1.3	0.9	0.6	0.5	0.5	1.8	:	0.5	0.4	0.3
Total	5	5.4	3.8	3.5	4.8	7.8	10.9	9.0	9.6	10.5	7.3

Source: Eurostat, <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/emp/redisstat/databrowser/explore/all/imp?display=card&sort=category>.

Notes: The activation rate is the number of participants in the measure (entrants) during a year to the number of registered unemployed plus the participants of the measures whose registration is ended when taking part in the measure. Some small-scale measures are omitted. ':' denotes no data collected for that year.



### **6.3 Youth Guarantee**

Czechia adopted the European Council recommendation on implementing the Youth Guarantee programme (YG) in 2014. The implementation plan suggests focusing on ‘promoting the creation of new jobs, ensuring employment through job centres, supporting educational activities according to individual needs, interconnecting education and employer requirements, and getting the experience’ (MPSV, 2014: 8).

An ‘offer’ within the YG scheme includes one or more of the following measures: job offer as information about the vacancy, professional traineeship (accompanied by support of the individual mentor in some cases), requalification/vocational training, subsidized job, internships abroad, return to education. The majority of the YG measures, however, were job offers – information about job vacancies available in the labour market which appear suitable for young jobseekers (European Commission, 2016).

The labour market policy in Czechia has been better targeted at the group of young people under 30 years of age since the YG programme started in 2014 and the previously existing measures were used. During 2014–2016 new programmes were constantly established and innovative modifications were made to already successful programmes. Besides the project of Professional Traineeships in companies for young people up to 30 years, the ‘Internships for youth’ programme (for future graduates) was introduced, which continued in the ‘The path for youth’ (Cesta pro mladé) project (2016–2020). Under the ‘Professional Traineeships’ programme, wage subsidies were provided up to the level of 24,000 CZK per month (the net average wage in the country) and were much more generous than in any other job creation scheme (nearly 70 percent higher). The most important innovative measure was mentorship, provided to approximately 30 percent of the scheme participants. The project could also include individual, group and career counselling, vocational training (in some rare cases), and other support such as reimbursement of travel costs, costs of health screening before job placement, and food during project activities (Hora, Horáková & Sirovátka, 2018). It was aimed at people under 30 years of age who had little or no work experience (maximum two years), and who had been registered with PES for at least four months. The initiative was introduced in April 2013 and lasted until August 2015.

There is some experience that there might be considerable creaming-off inside of the broad age category of young unemployed (those aged 15–29) who took part in Youth Guarantee measures.

This targeting failure is well documented when analysing the most popular measure for the youth implemented under the Youth Guarantee scheme in 2014, i.e. the so-called Professional Traineeship scheme for the youth below 30 years of age (see Hora et al., 2018). This scheme provided wage subsidies for young

people (for 6–12 months) and mentors (for up to seven months), and retraining of candidates when the employer deemed it necessary.

The data show that the apprenticeship scheme in 2014 was targeted rather at the groups of young people who were less disadvantaged in the labour market regarding their age, education, and previous unemployment experience.

Under YG, there was a follow-up project ‘Guarantee for the Youth’ carried out in the period 2016–2020, in many aspects similar to the original ‘Professional Traineeship’ scheme. The major difference with the previous scheme was a lower wage subsidy amounting to 15,000 CZK per month, perhaps reflecting the improved situation of young people in the Czech labour market. According to data provided by MPSV, there were over 5,000 participants at the end of 2018 (see MPSV, 2019d). In contrast to the 2014 scheme, which did not have any targeting requirements, this project addressed mainly disabled young people, those with cumulated handicaps in the labour market, and those returning after parental leave.

However, data on targeting of the follow-up project in the period 2016–2020 document further targeting failures in some respects, in particular selection bias in favour of more employable participants. Similarly, the 14–17 age group, where many education system dropouts and NEETs may be expected, and the 26–29 age group, where the scarring effect of previous unemployment during recession may be expected, are targeted half as much as the others. The positive finding was that YG was targeted more at women and disabled youth.

To sum up, within Bonoli’s typology, incentivizing (indirect) is relatively strong in the case of youth because of their modest entitlements for unemployment and social assistance benefits. The leading ALMP measure is employment assistance, with the use of generous job subsidies (‘Professional Traineeship’ scheme). Occupation is a much less provided measure to the youth when compared to job-seekers older than 25 years. The reason is that job subsidies for private sector jobs like Professional Traineeship are considered more appropriate for young people and have been used much more extensively since 2014 (see Table 8.2). Upskilling is the measure least available to young people: this is a weakness of Czech ALMPs, similar to failures in targeting the measures to the most disadvantaged youth.

## 7. CULTURAL FACTORS

The social citizenship dimension of Chevalier’s typology concerns young people’s public support (social benefits, grants, etc.). Social citizenship is familialized when youth is conceived as part of childhood, and parents are still deemed to support youths as they are financially dependent. Alternatively, social citizenship can be individualized when young people are conceived as adults. In this case, young people can claim social benefits as independents rather earlier (see Chevalier, 2015).

In Czechia, studying in most public high schools, higher technical schools, and universities is free. In addition, schools can provide scholarships to excellent students. Schools also offer cheaper housing in dormitories. Students have substantially reduced travel costs on public transport. Students from low-income families have entitlement to specific social scholarships (MŠMT, 2021).

According to STEM/MARK (2015, 2019), about one-third of young people under 30 years live with their parents. Eurostat data (2020) show a higher share – about 50 percent (youth below 25) and 30 percent (youth 25–29). Although young people would like to live away from their parents, it is not always financially possible. Reasons include very high and fast-growing housing prices, lack of housing policy and strong preference for housing ownership among young people (Sociologický ústav AV ČR, 2021). On average, women, people living in larger cities, and the less educated leave their parents' homes earlier (STENMARK, 2019). Young people (up to 29 years) who live in separate households are primarily childless and live alone (Mlynářová & Spáčil, 2016). Young people usually have children later, after 30. A low economic standard of living (at the minimum level or slightly above) is more typical for households headed by young people up to 25 years (Mlynářová & Spáčil, 2016). Poverty is traditionally highly prevalent among the unemployed (Maleček & Čermáková, 2015).

An essential difference from other countries is the specific cultural pattern of care for children. Czech women typically prefer to stay with newly born children at home for quite a long time and then work full time rather than part-time after parental leave (SocioFaktor, 2016; European Commission, 2017). Sometimes caring parents are classified as NEETs, which is considered a controversial issue (see MPSV, 2014).

The Czech social security system of income protection comprises three tiers: social insurance (I), social support (II), and social assistance (III). Young people can have entitlement for the basic level of unemployed insurance (social security, tier I), provided for five months at a level of 65, 50, and 45 percent of previous net income. Unemployment insurance is reduced to 45 percent with voluntary leave of employment. The total coverage of the registered unemployed population by unemployment benefit was 30.5 percent in December 2017 and 35.6 percent in December 2018 (MPSV, 2019b; MPSV, 2019c). According to MPSV (2019c), the coverage of category school graduates and young people up to 20 years was between 5 percent and 8 percent (7.7 percent in December 2018).<sup>2</sup> It is low because young people cannot usually fulfil the entitlement condition of one year of employment in the last two years. The average unemployment insurance benefits (for all unemployed) were 6,969 CZK in 2017 and 7,316 CZK in 2018 (MPSV, 2019a). This amount is about 30 percent of the average net income in the Czech economy.

Young people may also claim social support benefits (social security, tier II), namely child allowances, parental benefit, and housing benefits. Child allowances are means tested and their level is rather low (880 CZK). The child's age is deci-

sive for entitlement, not the parent's age. Child allowances can be provided until 26 years of age (young people can claim this benefit themselves when they are 18 years old – the benefit belongs to the child). More support for working parents is provided through tax reliefs based on the number and age of children.

Young people can also be protected by parental benefit (tier II) when they are parents (about 90,000 young claimants in 2018; see MPSV, 2019a). Women represent 98 percent of benefit claimants (see ČSÚ, 2019c, Table 5.9). Parental benefit is relatively generous for parents earning low salaries. The benefit is flat, with the basic amount set at the level of 40 percent of the average wage in the public sector. The total amount can be spread over a shorter or longer period up until the child is four years old. It allows the choice of a specific family strategy and a combination of claiming benefits and working when other family members temporarily care for the child. Benefit eligibility is quite wide, but the level of benefit is not itself sufficient for independence.

Social assistance (social security, tier III) has two major benefits: personal needs and housing. Both these benefits are provided in fixed amounts. Children are considered dependent on parents until age 26, when they do not have income (for example, they are still studying) or until 18, when they have finished their studies. Dependent children have lower social assistance benefits than other adults in the household. The level of benefits is relatively low, partially because of delays in valorization. People living in one place are considered one household, despite their age. Young people living with parents are rarely eligible for social assistance until they move to their own homes.

The general poverty risk rate for young people in Czechia is low, 10–12 percent (see ČSÚ, 2019a). The usual explanation for this is that young people up to age 24 are protected by the incomes of their parents (see Maleček and Čermáková, 2015). However, Večerník and Mysíková (2015) worry about the validity of income poverty indicators in the Czech context. Median (2018) conducted a specific representative survey among 800 young people. When using a more comprehensive definition of poverty (including income poverty, material deprivation, and economic inactivity), they found that 22 percent of young people could be poor and up to 40 percent among young people who have only elementary or vocational education.

The debt of young people in Czechia is high. Half of the young people up to 30 years of age have debts, often including mortgages and debts from buying cars (see KRUK, 2020). For most young people, debts are not a severe problem. However, a specific group of young people up to 24 years have more debts and substantial overall debt levels. They have high accumulated debt from previous borrowings and have borrowed more money to pay off their previous debts (Hypindex, 2017; Ginter, 2017; KRUK, 2020). They have low incomes, may not be sufficiently oriented in financial risks, or sometimes they do not care. Social workers of NGOs (Člověk v tísni and Charita) stated that accumulated debts make up a reason to

leave school, a substantial barrier to entering the formal labour market, and risk of losing housing (see research reports NGO Charita, 2017; 2018).

From the perspective of ‘social citizenship’ provided by Chevalier (2015), the regime is familiarized. Although presenting some aspects of the individualized system (for example, parental benefit), it is weak on youth independence. Children are seen as dependent on their parents, and parents are expected to support them. Parents get additional support from the state to support their children. Children have some extra protection, discounts, and other advantages until they finish their studies. From the perspective of economic citizenship, the results are mixed. While the education system is quite widely accessible (high enrolment, low dropout), this is less true for a selective active labour market policy. The critical issue in both parts of the systems is whether these systems are working reasonably well or addressing quality issues.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

In the period after the 2008/2009 crisis, the economic situation in Czechia was driven by a long-lasting boom after 2014 that led to a substantial decrease in unemployment, including unemployment of young people. In 2017–2018, labour shortages were apparent and represented a limit to economic growth. Czechia represents an open economy, particularly exposed to trade disruptions. The strong share of manufacturing and construction compared to services represents the specific feature of the economy.

Although the general situation of young people in the labour market is good, there is a severe inclusion risk or penalty for young people with low education or other specific problems. Young people often hesitate to work in the fields they originally studied. Flexible working, such as long-term fixed-term contracts and part-time work, is not widely used. On the other hand, newly emerging forms of work (semi-legally or illegally) avoid the security rules of the employment contract.

The Czech education system is highly stratified with the first selection between 11 and 13 years of age. Learning outcomes are increasingly affected by the socio-economic status of Czech pupils and their families. Roma children, in particular, have lower educational aspirations and poorer opportunities for education and employment. Regional differences also manifest themselves significantly. In Czechia, a strong emphasis is put on vocational rather than general education. However, vocational education is school-based, with a poor link to the labour market. The emphasis placed on on-the-job training is weak and the involvement of employers in defining qualification goals and standards is not sufficient. Hence, youth transitions from vocational education to the labour market are prolonged and complicated, since the graduates lack sufficient practice and appropriate technical and professional knowledge.

Although the share of the population with tertiary education is increasing, it remains below the average of other European countries. The Czech education system has been under-funded for a long time, implying a poor quality of education and low prestige of the teaching profession.

Our findings regarding ALMPs are to a great extent under the hypotheses suggested by Tosun, Unt, and Wandensjo (2017): path dependency in policies is quite strong. The traditional profile of ALMP measures was reinforced thanks to YG and the ESF resources available from 2014, with a greater emphasis on employment assistance to youth and a decreasing emphasis on upskilling. In principle, the substance of the most popular measure (Professional Traineeship scheme for youth) remained very similar to the pre-existing measures. At the same time, the targeting of ALMP measures at vulnerable groups of youth unemployed continued to fail (omitting marginal age categories and low-skilled youth).

On the other hand, the scope of measures for the youth increased considerably, as shown by activation rates when YG supported by ESF was implemented, as well as the targeting of the measures on the youth below 25 years of age. Second, thanks to the learning effect, some innovations in the measures were also adopted which support individualization and quality: mentors, a more substantial level of job subsidy, and a new internship scheme for young people before they enter the labour market.

Young people's level of protection from unemployment insurance and social assistance is low. Protection is better when claiming parental benefits based neither on strict eligibility criteria nor on income tests (most parental benefit recipients are women). From the perspective of 'youth welfare citizenship' (Chevalier, 2015), the regime is familialized because children are seen as dependent on their parents and parents are expected to support them (see above for how age criteria are included in benefit entitlements).

In the Czech case, path dependency is stronger than the effects of EU level learning and subsidizing, which is probably because unemployment has not been a pressing issue since 2016, rather labour shortages were evidenced. In addition, increased scope of ALMP measures for youth, and innovation in the measures, strongly depend on ESF financing and seem to be only temporary, until ESF projects are in place.

## NOTES

1. Entry test is easier for general education graduates than for vocational education graduates.
2. This coverage rate is underestimating the number of people who really claimed unemployment insurance during their unemployment spell. When we include all UI benefits also provided in previous months and years, 54.3 percent of unemployed received unemployment insurance among unemployed registered during 2016 (OKPráce data, own calculations). However, only 2.3 percent of young people aged

15–19 years and 32.3 percent of young people aged 20–24 years received unemployment insurance (about half compared to some older cohorts).

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