



Ministry of Foreign Affairs
of the Czech Republic

Human Rights and Transition Promotion Policy Framework





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1 | Starting points and principles

The revised Human Rights and Transition Promotion Policy Framework (“Policy Framework”) stems from the Czech Republic’s Security Policy and the Czech Republic’s Foreign Policy Framework which embed the interests and goals of Czech foreign policy into the current international context and set out that the promotion of democracy, human rights and the principles of the rule of law on the international stage is one of the core values of Czech foreign policy as well as a major security interest for Czechia.

Czech foreign policy is centred around the pillars of protection and promotion of democratic values and human rights, respect for international law, and active and open attitude towards non-governmental organisations and civil society. Czech human rights and transition promotion policy is built on the conviction that human rights are the foundation of human dignity. Human rights lie at the core of open, inclusive and free societies worldwide, and the respect for human rights contributes to economic development and social stability. Countries that do not respect the human rights of their citizens are often disrespectful of international law and order. Promoting and supporting human rights around the world is therefore one of the foreign policy tools by which we can ensure our security. At the same time, efforts must be taken to reinforce democracy and its principles and to build resilience of society to current hybrid threats and to disinformation attacks that undermine the values on which the international liberal order is based. This is an important part of our response to complex and overlapping security risks.

Czechia’s approach to the promotion of human rights and democracy is based on the principles of universality and indivisibility of human rights and on the principle of equality and non-discrimination enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The respect for international law and the support for international criminal justice are the essential foundations for human rights and transition promotion. Czechia is a party to human rights treaties of the United Nations (UN) and regional international organisations (including the Council of Europe and the European Union) and builds its human rights promotion policy on the principles and commitments contained therein. By pursuing the cause of human rights at the national level, in bilateral relations, in the context of EU policies and in other international organisations, Czechia contributes to security, stability and sustainable development worldwide.

Czech human rights and transition promotion policy reflects the humanistic principles of

Czech political thought as well the historical experience of opposition to an undemocratic regime, transition to democracy and market economy and integration into EU structures; and builds largely on the legacy of President Václav Havel, during whose tenure the promotion of democracy, human rights and civil society became one of the main priorities for Czech foreign policy.

Czech human rights and transition promotion policy is based on the conviction that the Czech experience – although unique in some respects – is by and large universal and can be shared with other members of the international community to help them ensure human rights for their populations. Keen to offer its experience to others, Czechia is nevertheless aware that the only way to share this experience is through an open dialogue. Czechia is ready to conduct that dialogue, bilateral or multilateral, with governments, civil society and other actors.

Transition promotion (a specific tool of Czech foreign policy) builds on Czechia's experience of undergoing societal transition and building a democracy. Czechia has much to offer especially to societies transitioning to democracy with which it can share its experience (positive and negative) of fostering the rule of law and promoting civic participation. When it comes to human rights and democracy, and particularly to the issues identified in this Policy Framework, Czechia is nonetheless ready to lend a hand to any society.

Czech human rights policy is committed to coherence, credibility and openness. Consistent and goal-directed work in this area raises Czechia's profile and contributes to its positive international image and reputation as a developed, responsible and solidarity-minded democratic country capable of learning from its own past.

Czechia is aware of the complexity of today's changing world where there are no simple solutions to complex problems. In an ever-changing world, Czech human rights and transition promotion policy must be grounded in the above mentioned – and clearly articulated – principles, yet it must be implemented flexibly enough to respond to changes as may be necessary.

Czech human rights and transition promotion policy works in synergy with other Czech foreign policy priorities, including security and promotion of exports. Czechia seeks to maintain the greatest possible coherence across all priority areas of its foreign policy.

2 | Key aims and priorities

By promoting democracy, human rights and the principles of the rule of law, Czech foreign policy aims to help ensure a life of dignity for all, develop democratic institutions and encourage the broadest possible participation of the public in governance. It also aspires to contribute to international stability and security by curbing the emergence of security threats (regional conflicts, terrorism or illegal migration) and has a fundamental role to play in the achievement of sustainable development goals and in increasing prosperity.

Democracy is the rule of the majority, yet it ensures equal rights and freedoms for all, including persons in vulnerable and marginalised situations. Czech human rights and transition promotion policy is committed, among other aims, to overcoming historical, social, cultural, digital, religious and ideological barriers to achieve equality and hence provide a life of dignity for all without distinction.

The priorities of the human rights and transition promotion policy are to highlight human rights violations wherever they occur, to bring specific solutions to protect human rights defenders and unjustly persecuted and independent journalists, and to actively participate in the global dialogue on the protection of human rights and freedoms. The support for international human rights mechanisms and mainstreaming aims to improve their functioning through a global human rights dialogue.

Czechia engages in the international human rights mechanisms and continues to actively contribute to their efficient functioning. In this context, the primary mechanism responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe is the UN Human Rights Council on which Czechia seeks to secure a seat as often as possible and to be its efficient member and to actively participate in its work. Czechia also plays an active role in the UN General Assembly (namely the Third Committee), in the Council of Europe and in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (Human Dimension), and is committed to supporting the mainstreaming of human rights aspects in the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union and in other EU policies (priorities pursued in the individual groupings are described in detail in the section “Multilateral tools”).

Czechia bases its human rights and transition promotion policy on the assumption that human rights enshrined in the UN human rights treaties and in regional instruments apply online

as well as offline. However, in the light of dynamic developments in the digital sphere, it is increasingly important to pay attention to the promotion and respect of human rights in the digital environment. In international organisations (including the UN, Council of Europe, International Telecommunication Union and others) and on other platforms, Czechia aims to support the efficient implementation of the existing human rights standards also in the digital sphere and encourages the human rights-based approach and the human-centric approach. Whether online or offline, inside or outside the digital environment, Czechia pursues the same priorities.

The multilateral Czech human rights policy aims to effectively promote national priority topics in international organisations and human rights bodies and to maintain Czechia's position as a respected country that actively engages in the human rights policies of relevant international organisations and is consulted in debates on important decisions.

Thematic priorities

In promoting human rights, Czechia (given its historical experience and knowledge gained in the process implementing long-term Czech foreign policy priorities) concentrates primarily, but not exclusively, on:

1. supporting human rights defenders;
2. supporting civil society;
3. promoting the freedom of expression and freedom of the media;
4. promoting electoral rights and encouraging political and public participation;
5. supporting the building of rule of law institutions;
6. promoting equality and non-discrimination; and
7. promoting environmental human rights.

Priority No. 1: *Supporting human rights defenders*

One of the aims of the Czech human rights promotion policy is to support human rights defenders – organisations and individuals defending human rights. Special attention is paid to women human rights defenders and the specific forms of persecution they may face. Czechia helps

and supports these activists who often become the targets of persecution and intimidation. Czechia's action in this area is fully in line with the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders.

Czechia namely:

- a. participates actively in mechanisms supporting human rights defenders, especially in the work of the respective UN Special Rapporteur; and contributes to the drafting and adoption of broadly supported UN thematic resolutions;
- b. takes an active part in the implementation of the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, including further elaboration of the Shelter Cities initiative, as part of the European Union's Common Foreign and Defence Policy;
- c. maintains bilateral contacts with human rights defenders in third countries; raises the cases of persecuted human rights defenders in bilateral contacts as well as in international organisations; uses the network of Czech embassies to monitor the cases of persecuted defenders; and assists the persecuted defenders, where necessary, by way of appropriate tools such as visa support or relocation to Czechia or to a safe third country; and
- d. uses the Transition Promotion Programme to support projects focused on supporting human rights defenders worldwide.

Priority No. 2: *Supporting civil society*

Czechia regards civil society as a principal driver of pro-democratic change and the primary guarantor of the sustainability of such change. The free operation of civil society and interaction between independent non-governmental organisations and movements constitute essential pillars of a functioning democratic system.

Czech human rights and transition promotion policy aims to foster civil society, encourage its emancipation and develop its ability to be an effective and informed actor in political and societal processes. Civil society contributes to the strengthening of democratic culture; it enables different social groups to further their interests and oversees respect for human rights and the rule of law in society at large.

Czechia understands civil society in a broad sense – as not limited to non-governmental organisations, but including grassroots activities and diverse civic initiatives and movements. Civil society is co-shaped by activists, journalists, bloggers, lawyers, artists, writers and or-

dinary people from local communities. Civil society, as understood in this Policy Framework, naturally does not include individuals and organisations committing or propagating violence or spreading hatred towards certain groups.

Czechia namely:

- a. participates actively in international mechanisms supporting civil society; and encourages the broadest possible participation of civil society representatives in the work of international organisations;
- b. remains the penholder of the United Nations resolution on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association; cooperates actively on this issue with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); and organises side events focusing on this issue;
- c. supports the building of links between the political and programme levels of support for civil society, both through the agencies and bodies of the United Nations (OHCHR, UNDP, UNESCO, etc.) and through the regional instruments of the European Union (including the NDICI);
- d. supports the development of contacts with civil society in third countries as part of the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy;
- e. maintains active bilateral contacts with civil society in third countries; and
- f. uses the Transition Promotion Programme to support projects focused on strengthening civil society.

Priority No. 3: *Promoting the freedom of expression and freedom of the media*

Freedoms of expression and access to information are essential to a democratic society, to the rule of law and to public participation. Czechia supports free, pluralistic and independent media that provide access to information and opinion, enable public debate and guarantee informed decision-making on matters of public interest. Media and free access to the internet play a central role in promoting openness and accountability in public administration and public life. Media should enjoy legal protection against arbitrary interference in their content and media activities should be subject only to such restrictions as may be independently reviewable and as are prescribed by law and consistent with international standards. Complete or partial control over the media by the State or by political or economic interest groups has

serious adverse impacts on the overall state of freedom of expression and the quality of public decision-making.

Czechia namely:

- a. supports the work of Special Procedures of the United Nations (namely the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression); and contributes to the drafting and adoption of thematic resolutions on the freedom of expression;
- b. advocates for a global, free, open, interoperable, secure and reliable internet that fully respects human rights; and fights against internet shutdowns;
- c. raises the cases of persecuted journalists in international organisations as well as in bilateral contacts; uses the network of Czech embassies to monitor the cases of persecuted journalists; and, assists the persecuted journalists, where necessary, by way of appropriate tools such as visa support and relocation;
- d. fights against hate speech, harassment and violence online and against the misuse of digital technologies for purposes such as repression or online censorship;
- e. resubmits to the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly a resolution on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of digital technologies, initiated by Czechia in 2023, in order to promote respect for human rights in the digital environment;
- f. speaks up, together with other members of the Media Freedom Coalition (MFC) and Freedom Online Coalition (FOC), against specific attempts to restrict the right to freedom of expression and access to information; and supports initiatives aimed at promoting independent media and media and digital literacy (such as those triggered by the UNESCO-administered Global Media Defence Fund, International Programme for Development of Communication and others);
- g. supports the mandate and work of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) in the regional context;
- h. provides continuous support to the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Jiří Dienstbier and Václav Havel Journalism Fellowships designed for young journalists; and
- i. uses the Transition Promotion Programme to support projects focused on media freedom, pluralism and independence, on the training of journalists, on media literacy and integrity, and on the inclusion of human rights issues in media content.

Priority No. 4: *Promoting electoral rights and encouraging political and public participation*

Bearing in mind that active participation of an informed public contributes to good governance, the Czech human rights and transition promotion policy promotes citizen participation in public decision-making at all levels (local, regional, national).

The main tool for involving citizens in public decision-making is through periodic, free, general and equal elections held by secret ballot. Czechia advocates for the removal of all restrictions on the right to vote as well as on the right to be elected. The opportunity to participate in governance must be safeguarded throughout the electoral cycle and not only during the elections.

Czechia namely:

- a. remains the penholder of the United Nations resolution on equal political and public participation with a focus on electoral rights; cooperates actively on this issue with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights; and organises side events focusing on equal political and public participation;
- b. supports the election observation missions of the EU, OSCE and other relevant international organisations; sends its nationals to these missions; and incorporates the recommendations arising from the final reports of these missions into Czech multilateral and bilateral policies towards the countries concerned;
- c. uses the projects implemented under the Transition Promotion Programme to encourage the interaction of central, regional and local governments with civil society actors; this involves harnessing the potential of new technologies, activating and engaging young people in community and social activities and educating them in active citizenship, as well as encouraging the participation of women and marginalised and disadvantaged groups in decision-making processes; and
- d. promotes the right of citizens to comment on draft legislation as well as the freedom of access to information and the right to associate.

Priority No. 5: *Supporting the building of rule of law institutions*

The existence of rule of law institutions is one of the cornerstones of broad political and public participation. The rule of law provides a framework within which citizens can enjoy their rights and freedoms and can seek effective remedies for violations. It ensures that all are equal

before the law and serves as a bulwark against arbitrary interference of the State in the lives of citizens. The rule of law implicates the presence of an independent and impartial judiciary and other institutions competent to protect and promote human rights, such as the office of Ombudsperson. The rule of law guarantees the right to property and permits this right to be restricted only in cases justified by public interest and subject to compensation.

The rule of law and good governance require the separation and mutual control of the legislative, executive and judiciary powers. The rule of law implies that there are mechanisms in place to prevent the abuse of power and avoid political or economic influence and corruption as well as to detect, punish and remedy the same. With power devolved to the appropriate level of elected authorities and institutions, citizens can exercise effective control over governance. The health of the rule of law and governance is an important indicator of the legitimacy of the State. Czechia sees human rights, the rule of law, good governance and democracy as inextricably linked. Yet, at the same time, Czechia recognises that there is no universal and fully transferable model of democracy.

Czechia namely:

- a. in the relevant international organisations and bodies, promotes the equality of all before the law, the principles of legal certainty, judicial independence and impartiality, the availability of judicial review and the right of everyone to a fair trial;
- b. promotes full accountability for human rights violations at the national, regional and international levels as an integral part of the human rights protection system;
- c. supports activities aimed at combating torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment perpetrated by repressive structures within and outside the judicial system, including support for the ratification of, accession to and compliance with the appropriate international instruments;
- d. uses EU statements and declarations as well as bilateral contacts to speak up on cases of gross abuse of power, interference in judicial independence and impartiality, violation of the right to a fair trial, and on cases of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment; and calls for remedial action;
- e. uses active bilateral contacts of Czech diplomats and/or involvement of Czech diplomats in the diplomatic community to monitor the trials conducted in their countries of accreditation against activists, journalists, students and other unjustly persecuted persons on political grounds; and

- f. uses the projects implemented under the Transition Promotion Programme to support the development of human rights institutions, independent courts, security forces and other institutions, including oversight mechanisms and methodological guidance on issues of human rights and the rule of law.

Priority No. 6: *Promoting equality and non-discrimination*

The principle of equality and non-discrimination requires that no-one may be deprived of their rights on the grounds of sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or conviction, political beliefs or any other opinions, affiliation with a national minority, property, birth, disability, age, sexual orientation or gender identity; and that persons belonging to minorities have the equal right to participate in public life.

In this area, Czechia focuses primarily on promoting gender equality and full and equal participation of women in political and public life. Support of gender equality serves as a gateway to the enjoyment of fundamental rights of every human being regardless of gender or gender identity and helps eliminate structural inequalities, discrimination and gender-based violence often directed against women, girls and other marginalised groups.

Czechia supports activities aimed at ensuring equal rights and freedoms for all people in vulnerable situations, including children, young people, people with disabilities and the elderly, and at eradicating violence against women, girls and children, including in situations of armed conflict.

Czechia namely:

- a. in international organisations and in the EU, promotes gender equality, full and equal participation of persons in vulnerable and marginalised situations, equal opportunities for men and women, women's economic empowerment and women's participation and leadership in public life; speaks up against discrimination, including intersectional (multiple) discrimination; and supports the mainstreaming of equality into other policies;
- b. in the United Nations sessions, and in particular within the UN Human Rights Council and the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly, takes an active stance against violence inflicted on women, girls and children, including the use of gender-based and sexual violence in armed conflicts, and violence online; and supports the work of the UN WOMEN, UN CEDAW Committee, UN CRC Committee and the relevant UN Special Procedures;

- c. in bilateral contacts, raises the issue of equality and speaks up on serious cases of discrimination against women, girls, young people and LGBTI+ persons; and
- d. uses the projects implemented under the Transition Promotion Programme to promote the protection of human rights associated with equality and non-discrimination (including gender equality); and mainstreams gender equality also into other thematic priorities.

Priority No. 7: *Promoting environmental human rights*

While recognising the indivisibility and interdependence of human rights, Czechia focuses on the promotion and protection of environmental human rights. A clean, healthy and sustainable environment is a prerequisite for the enjoyment of a wide range of other human rights, including the right to food, water, sanitation or health. Czechia promotes a clean, healthy and sustainable environment for all – here, the primary concern is a human rights-based approach and respect for human rights standards in environmental policymaking.

Czechia namely:

- a. in international debates on reducing the effects of human activity on global climate, including in debates under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), promotes the right of all to a clean, healthy and safe environment and the right to timely access to complete information on the state of the environment and natural resources;
- b. in international organisations and other forums, supports and promotes the human rights-based approach to environmental issues; and
- c. uses the projects implemented under the Transition Promotion Programme to promote environmental human rights and to support environmental human rights defenders.

Programme countries

The geographic scope of Czech human rights and transition promotion policy reflects the mid- and long-term goals of Czech foreign policy. In addition, Czechia's action in multilateral forums focuses on countries targeted by country-specific resolutions of the UN Human Rights Council and countries for which the UN Human Rights Council appoints Special Rapporteurs with country mandates. The bilateral priorities are detailed in Czechia's respective regional foreign policy strategies. Within the Transition Promotion Programme, Czechia offers its

experience primarily to those countries that are culturally, geographically, historically or otherwise close to it. Therefore, the priority is to work with partners in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans. In well-founded cases, projects under the Transition Promotion Programme may be implemented in other regions as well. The list of Transition Promotion Programme countries may be updated if the situation so requires.

Domestic aspect

To be a credible voice for human rights in the world, Czechia must not be afraid to take a self-critical look at the human rights situation at home and the overall coherence of domestic policies in this area. Czechia builds its human rights and transition promotion policy on the principles of openness, coherence and credibility and takes care to never lose sight of its own commitments, including the voluntary ones.

Czechia does not hesitate to allow outside scrutiny of its human rights situation and of the way it implements the rulings of international courts. Czechia is subject to regular monitoring by UN treaty bodies. It issued a standing invitation to the Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council already in 2000. It will continue to openly communicate with UN treaty bodies, UN human rights mechanisms and other international mechanisms to provide timely information. Czechia is ready to consider any recommendations made during the Universal Periodic Review and to transparently implement the accepted ones.

Czechia considers every opportunity to become a party to existing and new UN conventions, regional instruments, commitments, and protocols to treaties.

The Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) seeks to develop synergies between Czech human rights and transition promotion policy and other government policies. It maintains an intensive dialogue with relevant government actors (especially with the Czech Government Office and with the Czech Government Commissioner for Human Rights) and takes an active part in the work of government advisory bodies (Government Council for Human Rights, Government Council for National Minorities, Government Council for Roma Minority Affairs, etc.). An ongoing dialogue with the Czech general public, including non-governmental organisations, and an effort to build public support for the cause of human rights, are also part of the self-reflection process. Domestic debate contributes to reflection in the area of Czech human rights policy and to the building of society-wide consensus on the main priorities.

3 | Tools

Czech human rights and transition promotion policy is embedded in Czechia's standard foreign policy procedures and steps, in its action within international organisations, including the EU, and in bilateral relationships. The Transition Promotion Programme and other tools (including visa and relocation support) provide additional scope for practical support. An important tool for promoting human rights and transition in the wider socio-economic sense is foreign development cooperation which interacts and shares many objectives with Czech human rights and transition promotion policy.

Multilateral tools

Czechia is a long-standing advocate of an international arrangement that would solve problems multilaterally and espouse efficiency and stability as well as equity. In this spirit, Czechia uses actively its membership within international organisations and other platforms to promote its human rights policy and pursue democracy. It urges international organisations to address human rights violations, and States to recognise their accountability and honour their commitments.

In the UN, Czechia actively supports the building of consensus on human rights resolutions across regional groups, with a special focus on topics identified as priorities in this Policy Framework. Czechia is involved in the global human rights dialogue evolving across political, cultural and social lines to improve the implementation of the universal, internationally recognised rules.

One of the most important tools is the membership of the main elected human rights body of the United Nations – the Human Rights Council (HRC). Therefore, Czechia intends to run for a seat on the HRC repeatedly.

In the UN, Czechia supports namely:

- a. prompt and adequate response by the HRC, acting within its mandate, to human rights situations that require its attention;

- b. efficient implementation of international human rights commitments;
- c. the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Special Procedures and treaty bodies, their work and their independence, impartiality and efficiency, including their sustainable funding;
- d. Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism, implementation of voluntary commitments, and active participation of civil society in the UPR process; and
- e. increase in the number of States Parties to the core UN human rights treaties.

In the EU, Czechia supports a strong mandate for the EU's external relations representatives who lead international negotiations on issues of human rights and democracy. Czechia contributes to the implementation of the Action Plan, human rights guidelines and country strategies. It takes part in developing common positions on human rights issues, actively contributes to meetings of the European Council's Working Party on Human Rights (COHOM) and the Political and Security Committee, and supports appropriate use of the EU's democracy support instruments, including election observation. Czechia seeks to bring important human rights issues into the agenda of the EU Foreign Affairs Council and the EU General Affairs Council. Czechia is an active observer in the EU's human rights dialogues and supports the inclusion of human rights issues in the agendas of interregional forums.

In the EU, Czechia supports namely:

- a. mainstreaming of human rights and transition aspects into the EU's external relations (especially into security, development and trade policies and into some regional policies such as the Eastern Partnership), and the incorporation of human rights and suspensive clauses into international treaties concluded between the EU and third countries;
- b. more effective coordination of the human rights and democracy promotion policy with the relevant financial instruments, including the NDICI;
- c. consistent implementation of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, human rights guidelines and third-country human rights strategies;
- d. sanctions regimes relating to human rights violations, including the submission of national proposals; and
- e. accession of the EU to the European Convention on Human Rights, which will enable external control over the EU's legal acts affecting human rights.

Czechia supports the control mechanisms of regional organisations, including the Court of Justice of the European Union and the European Court of Human Rights.

In the Council of Europe, Czechia takes an active part in the work of intergovernmental bodies (namely in the development of binding and non-binding human rights instruments) and calls for an open dialogue and cooperation of the member states with the Council of Europe mechanisms and institutions (including the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Venice Commission). Czechia also contributes, through its delegations, to the human rights protection efforts of the Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) and in the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. Czechia actively supports the implementation of the 2023 Reykjavík Summit commitments, especially in regards to holding Russia and Russian leadership accountable for the aggression in Ukraine. Czechia supports the functioning of the Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of Russia against Ukraine and is involved in the establishment of a claims commission, a compensation fund and a special tribunal for the crime of aggression committed by the Russian leadership against Ukraine. Czechia pays attention to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the European Court of Human Rights and advocates for consistent enforcement of the Court's judgments. It also supports the Council of Europe activities that can realistically prevent the erosion of democracy in the member states.

In the OSCE's Human Dimension, Czechia supports autonomous OSCE institutions and field and election observation missions. It takes an active stance against attempts to undermine the mandates and independence of the OSCE's autonomous institutions: Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM), and High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM). Czechia takes an active part in OSCE election observation missions and welcomes the re-invocation of the Moscow Mechanism established to monitor violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

Czechia supports international human rights organisations by providing financial contributions, seconding experts and nominating candidates for seats on expert and intergovernmental bodies. It seeks to increase the presence of Czech nationals in secretariats of international organisations and in the European External Action Service, especially in positions related to human rights and democracy.

Bilateral tools

Czechia considers the human rights aspect in all its bilateral contacts as detailed in the respective regional foreign policy strategies. It conducts human rights consultations with like-minded as well as unlike-minded countries in order to establish cooperation and gain allies across regions, and its embassies raise human rights issues in their political contacts in the respective host countries. Czechia actively uses the Transition Promotion Programme to increase public awareness of human rights and of Czech priorities in this area. At the Czech MFA and embassies, diplomats regularly meet with civil society representatives, activists, independent journalists, released political prisoners and other actors, whether in the context of the projects falling under the Transition Cooperation Programme, or at the Mitterrand Breakfasts held annually on 10 December on the occasion of the International Human Rights Day.

Czech embassies and relevant MFA departments are closely involved in the human rights and transition promotion policy. They provide insights and analysis for informed decisions and give feedback, including recommendations on thematic priorities for the respective countries. Czech embassies are active and open in their dealings with the local public administration and local civil society actors. They maintain contacts with human rights defenders and use all available means to support them. They assist in the implementation of the EU's country-specific human rights strategies and take part in the work of the local EU Human Rights Working Groups (HRWG) as well as in donor coordination in the respective countries. In the countries where human rights and transition promotion projects take place, Czech embassies assist with project monitoring and evaluation and get actively involved in monitoring the trials of politically persecuted activists, on behalf of Czech diplomacy as well as within the framework of local coordination.

Czech embassies and relevant MFA departments namely (but not exclusively):

- a. raise human rights issues in political consultations and in regular contacts with governments, parliamentarians and public administration in the respective countries;
- b. work together with EU Delegations, other EU Member States and like-minded countries to enhance the effects of human rights consultations;
- c. provide background information for human rights resolutions, the Universal Periodic Review, dialogues, working parties, special representatives and representatives of relevant organisations;

- d. gather and assess relevant information on the human rights situation in the respective countries and propose Czechia's responses to human rights violations, including demarches, sanctions, monitoring of court hearings, etc.;
- e. examine and present to the Czech MFA proposals for local transition promotion projects and proposals for projects in support of independent media to be implemented in the respective country by non-governmental organisations;
- f. support ongoing or planned human rights and democratisation projects under the Transition Promotion Programme;
- g. contribute to public diplomacy on human rights issues and other forms of support to civil society and independent media in the respective countries;
- h. maintain contacts and relations with civil society and human rights defenders in the respective countries; raise the cases of persecuted human rights defenders in bilateral contacts and international organisations; monitor the cases of persecuted human rights defenders and, where necessary, assist them by way of appropriate tools such as visa support or relocation to Czechia or to a safe third country; and
- i. propose, where justified, the use of national sanctions mechanism as a human rights tool to punish individuals responsible for attacks and persecution of human rights defenders and journalists.

Transition Promotion Programme

The Transition Promotion Programme enables Czechia to coordinate the political and practical levels of its human rights activities. Czechia will continue to use it actively as one of the main tools of Czech human rights and transition promotion policy. The Transition Promotion Programme provides a modern, systematic approach based on the proven correlation between democracy and human rights.

The purpose of the Transition Promotion Programme is to select, manage and fund human rights and transition promotion projects and activities consistent with the aims and priorities outlined in this Policy Framework. The Transition Promotion Programme is based on partnership and cooperation with civil society, non-governmental organisations, local public administration and the media. The form and content of each project is tailored to the local conditions and to the specific needs of the beneficiary/target country.

The human rights and transition promotion policy is managed and funded by the Czech MFA.

Funds are allocated in accordance with the applicable laws and regulations, government subsidy rules and MFA internal regulations. The procedures are compatible with the system of foreign development cooperation.

The Czech MFA encourages the projects of Czech non-governmental non-profit organisations to be co-funded by governments of partner countries, by European and international institutions and by foreign non-governmental organisations. Cooperation within the European Union is particularly desirable as it enhances the effects of the national human rights and transition promotion policy.

Promotion of human rights and transition in beneficiary countries takes the form of bilateral and multilateral activities and projects. Projects are selected annually in a selection process based on the criteria set by the Czech Government. The projects can be for one year, or for several years to address complex issues and achieve sustainable results.

The Transition Promotion Programme covers also projects implemented through Czech embassies – local transition promotion projects, including projects in support of the media and projects consisting in donations to non-governmental non-profit organisations abroad. Some projects or one-off activities are implemented directly by the Czech MFA. The transition promotion procedure is described in detail in the Annex to this Policy Framework.

4 | Annex

TRANSITION PROMOTION PROGRAMME



This Annex complements the Human Rights and Transition Promotion Policy Framework. It sets out the general rules of the Transition Promotion Programme (TRANS Programme) and the ways to achieve the goals of Czech human rights and transition promotion policy. The procedures to be followed in each stage of the TRANS Programme are stipulated in the MFA internal regulations developed by the MFA's Human Rights and Transition Policy Department (guidelines governing the granting of subsidies by the Human Rights and Transition Policy Department from the MFA budget and guidelines governing the selection, approval and implementation of local and other transition promotion projects).

The TRANS Programme has been administered by the Human Rights and Transition Policy Department starting from 1 August 2007.

1. Funding

The amount of funding available under the TRANS Programme is limited by the amount earmarked for that purpose under the State Budget Act for the respective calendar year. The funding is budgeted and allocated to the Czech MFA, as part of the foreign development cooperation budget which is subject to annual approval by the Czech Government. The responsibility for spending the allocated funding lies with the Human Rights and Transition Policy Department.

2. Thematic priorities

In alignment with the Human Rights and Transition Promotion Policy Framework, the TRANS Programme focuses on the following thematic priorities: 1) supporting human rights defenders; 2) supporting civil society; 3) promoting the freedom of expression and freedom of the media; 4) promoting electoral rights and encouraging political and public participation; 5)

supporting the building of rule of law institutions; 6) promoting equality and non-discrimination; and 7) promoting environmental human rights. Said priorities are described in more detail in the Human Rights and Transition Promotion Policy Framework.

3. Programme countries

The TRANS Programme is designed for countries in transition and for non-democratic countries where societies visibly strive for democratisation and improvement of human rights. The TRANS Programme priority countries include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burma/Myanmar, Cuba, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, Russia, Serbia, Ukraine and Vietnam.

Subsidised projects in thematic priority 1) *supporting human rights defenders* may be implemented in any country/countries worldwide.

Transition promotion, whether in the programme or other countries, cannot begin unless relevant and credible partners explicitly express their interest in the project.

4. Methods

A core part of the TRANS Programme is to provide support to soft projects consisting in the sharing and transfer of experience by Czech project promoters. This is reflected in the methods used to achieve the project objectives: typically, the sharing of information, experience and best practice, organisation of training, practical workshops, visits and secondments of Czech experts to target countries, and arrangement of study visits to Czechia for foreign participants involved in the projects.

A special method is the awarding of microgrants, preferably to small and grassroots non-governmental non-profit organisations or initiatives. Microgrants complement the training provided under the TRANS Programme and enable the trainees to put lessons into practice under the consultative guidance of a TRANS project implementer. Direct financial or in-kind support is admissible in the case of human rights defenders and independent media or in cases of particular interest (such as in situations of armed conflict).

5. Tools

To achieve the objectives of the TRANS Programme, the Human Rights and Transition Policy Department uses the following tools:

5.1. Subsidies

5.1.1. Call for proposals

The Human Rights and Transition Policy Department annually invites non-governmental non-profit organisations to submit applications for subsidies awarded on the basis of a Czech Government resolution¹. The applications (proposals for projects to be implemented in the programme countries) are reviewed by the Human Rights and Transition Policy Department for compliance with the thematic priorities and consulted with the competent Czech embassy and respective MFA territorial desks. Projects to be funded are selected by a selection board comprising external experts. The results of the selection process are published in the Grantys system before the end of the calendar year preceding the year in which the project is to be implemented. The subsidy is confirmed by a Subsidy Award Decision which includes detailed instructions on the use of and accounting for the subsidy.

Transition promotion projects fall into one of the following categories based on their duration:

- **One-year projects** – projects implemented within a maximum of 12 months. The subsidy is paid from the funds allocated for the given year. The project must begin and end within one calendar year. The minimum duration of the project is 9 months.
- **Multi-year projects** – projects implemented within 18-36 months (at least 9 months during the first year of implementation). Multi-year projects enable the project implementer to address more complex issues and achieve more visible results. The purpose of the subsidy is to support targeted and consistent work in programme countries, or work on priority issues, and to ensure that the project achieves long-term sustainable results.

Subsidies granted to multi-year projects are subject to annual appropriations confirmed by annual Subsidy Award Decisions, yet without the need for the subsidy recipient to re-submit the project proposal, re-apply for subsidies and undergo a new selection process. The next year's portion of the subsidy is released after the recipient presents for approval a report on the previous project year, including a statement of accounts.

¹ The granting of subsidies from the state budget to non-governmental organisations is governed by the *Government Principles for the Granting of Subsidies from the State Budget to Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organisations* approved by Government Resolution No. 591 of 1 June 2010.

Subsidies provided to the selected projects through the Human Rights and Transition Policy Department cover up to 90 per cent of the total project cost. Project implementers are expected to seek co-funding from other sources to cover the remaining 10 or more per cent of the project cost. For multi-year projects, this requirement applies to each budgetary year. In cases of particular interest (for instance, a response to unanticipated crisis situations or a response to new opportunities emerging in the target countries), the subsidy may cover up to 100 per cent of the total project cost.

5.1.2. Co-funding of subsidised projects

Co-funding of subsidised projects is a special procedure designed to encourage cooperation with major donors (such as the European Union) and to raise the chance for Czech projects to succeed in international competition. TRANS Programme co-funding is available to projects consistent with the aims of the TRANS Programme. Co-funding (covering no more than 30 per cent of the project budget) is provided under a separate call for proposals.

5.1.3. Cooperation with strategic partners

The TRANS Programme supports strategic partners (non-governmental non-profit organisations, networks, platforms, and umbrella non-governmental non-profit organisations). The strategic partner's activity must be consistent with the priorities of the human rights and transition promotion policy. Strategic partners must be selected by a selection board and must have a track record of at least two years' cooperation with the Czech MFA. Strategic partners may receive from the Human Rights and Transition Policy Department a subsidy for their one-year or multi-year projects covering up to 90 per cent of the total project cost. Project implementers are expected to seek co-funding from other sources to cover the remaining 10 or more per cent.

5.1.4. Support provided to platforms

This type of subsidies is intended for umbrella non-governmental non-profit organisations and other eligible entities whose projects focus on strengthening the capacity and operational readiness of umbrella human rights and transition promotion organisations. The projects may consist in institutional support, capacity building, awareness raising and support for the activities of such organisations and entities in international institutions. The formal criteria, including the requirement for project promoters to seek co-funding from other sources to cover the remaining 10 per cent of the project cost, and the course and timing of the project

year, are identical to those applicable to applications for subsidies granted under the TRANS Programme. The relevant selection process usually takes place at the same time as the TRANS Programme.

5.2. Support provided through Czech embassies

Within the TRANS Programme, Czech MFA annually invites Czech embassies to submit proposals for local transition promotion projects and proposals for projects in support of independent media based on suggestions from civil society. In cases of particular interest, Czech embassies may propose additional projects focused on strengthening civil society and independent media. These additional local transition promotion projects may be supported by way of cash donations abroad, or by way of purchase of small equipment to support the transition process, or by way of payment for contracted services.

5.3. Contracts of mandate

Some minor services are ordered directly by the Human Rights and Transition Policy Department under the signed contracts of mandate². These are, as a rule, one-off services provided by authorised experts (training or support service for human rights defenders relocated to Czechia under the Shelter Cities programme), elaboration of studies, human rights awareness activities and supplies of material.

6. Administration

Administration of the TRANS Programme falls completely under the competence of the Human Rights and Transition Policy Department. In managing public funds on behalf of Czech MFA, the Human Rights and Transition Policy Department applies both first-level control and government-level control procedures. Projects are supervised and audited in accordance with Public Administration Financial Auditing Act No. 320/2001, Ministry of Finance Regulation No. 416/2004 implementing Act No. 320/2001, and in accordance with State Audit Act No. 552/1991, Budgetary Rules Act No. 218/2000, and Rules of Administrative Procedure No. 500/2004, as amended.

² The provision of support under a contract of mandate is regulated by Public Procurement Act No. 137/2006.

6.1. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation of projects and activities is essential to the transition promotion policy and its management. Monitoring consists in regular collection of data on the progress of the project, its results and the balance of the project funds. Projects supported under the TRANS Programme are monitored by Czech embassies in coordination with the Human Rights and Transition Policy Department.

Detailed instructions on the monitoring and final assessment of projects, the accounting for project funds, the procedures to be followed when requesting approval for changes to project content and budget, as well as document archiving rules, are set out in an annex to each Subsidy Award Decision.

Evaluation consists in systematic and objective assessment of the project in terms of its relevance, efficiency, impacts and sustainability. Comprehensive evaluation serves as a basis for the development of new programmes, projects and activities and for decisions on future distribution of funds to countries and sectors. The evaluation and its recommendations on ways to improve the processes for the future help increase the efficiency of the TRANS Programme as a whole.

In accordance with the recommendations from past evaluations, the Human Rights and Transition Policy Department will provide support to multi-year projects, and place more emphasis on a thorough analysis of the needs of target groups and on cooperation with relevant actors and other donors. More attention will be paid to opportunities for synergy in bilateral development cooperation in common priority countries. To improve the efficiency of the TRANS Programme, it is crucially important to build the capacities of project implementers.



Ministry of Foreign Affairs
of the Czech Republic