

CZECH REPUBLIC

Key Contextual Data

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The authors would like to thank Barbora Loudová Stralczynská for reviewing the text and providing additional information.

Citation suggestion:

Schreyer, I. and P. Oberhuemer. 2017. "Czech Republic – Key Contextual Data". In *Workforce Profiles in Systems of Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe*, edited by P. Oberhuemer and I. Schreyer. www.seepro.eu/English/Country_Reports.htm

Funded by:

Sources are outlined at the end of each section. Full details of all sources are to be found in the references section at the end of the key contextual data profile. Individual statistical data used in tables are indicated by an asterisk*, both in the table and in the sources.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

ECEC system type and auspices

Early childhood education and care in the Czech Republic organised as a split-sector system. Kindergartens (*mateřské školy*), which since the amended Education Act (178/2016) admit children from 2 years up to school entry, come under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (*Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy*), known locally as the Schools Ministry. Regional and municipal authorities are responsible for the local organisation and administration.

The ECEC sector for children under 3 years of age is currently undergoing multiple reforms. Since 2013, the Ministry of Health is no longer responsible for day nurseries for the under-threes (*jesle*). Instead, existing nurseries have been transformed into a variety of settings under the auspices of different ministries. Some now come under the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (*Ministerstvo průmyslu a obchodu*) and are continuing in a new form (*zařízení pro péči o děti do 3 let*), for example, as social or health facilities. These settings have to fulfil the legislative requirements of the Small Trading Act. A further change came about at the end of 2014, when legislative provision was made for setting up age-integrated (1-6 years) facilities called Children's Groups (*dětské skupině*) which fall under the auspices of the Ministry for Employment and Social Affairs (*Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí*).

Beyond this new legislation, the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs is funding a pilot project which is providing 'micro-crèches' for children aged 6 months up to 4 years guided by the family day care approach in Germany.

Sources: EPIC 2016.
European Commission, EACEA, Eurydice, and Eurostat 2014.
Eurydice 2015.
MŠMT 2016.

General objectives and legislative framework

The ECEC system in the Czech Republic is embedded in overall objectives of the government aiming to improve the life-work-balance of young families and women's labour market chances through more flexible parental leave arrangements and working hours models. Among other initiatives, these goals are currently being pursued through a government gender equality strategy (2014-2020). Other relevant documents are the "Education Policy Strategy 2020" and the "Long-term Plan for Education and Development of the Education System 2015-2020".

Overall objectives for kindergartens for 2-/3- to 6-year olds are laid down in the Education Act (*Zákon o předškolním, základním, středním, vyšším odborném a jiném vzdělávání, 2004 with amendments 2015*), which foregrounds the learning process and lifelong learning. The work in educational settings is seen as complementary to family upbringing practices.

Since 2014, major goals of the newly founded Children's Groups (1-6 years) are: taking into account children's discernible needs, developing age-appropriate skills, and educating for health and hygiene. Since November 2014, the legislative framework for these and other settings for children under age 3 are the Children's Groups Act (*Zákon o poskytování služby péče o dítě v dětské skupině a o změně souvisejících zákonů, 2014*) and the Small Business Act (*Zákon o živnostenském podnikání, 1991*).

Sources: EPIC 2016.
European Commission, EACEA, Eurydice, und Eurostat 2014.
MŠMT 2016.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory enrolment age

From the age of 5, children have a legal entitlement to a place for 40 hours per week* in kindergarten for the year preceding school entry. Since 1st September 2017, this entitlement has been extended to 4-year olds and as from September 2018 it will also apply to 3-year olds (Education Act 178/2016, §34,3). There are government plans to further extend this entitlement to 2-year olds by 2020.

Kindergarten attendance has not traditionally been compulsory. However, an amendment to the Education Act approved by the Czech parliament in May 2016 has changed this. Since September 2017, the final year before school entry is obligatory. This year does not necessarily have to be spent in a kindergarten, it can also be spent in the family or in non-registered early childhood provision. In such cases, the child's progress is assessed regularly in a designated kindergarten near the family's home.

Primary school begins at 6 years of age.

Sources: *European Commission, EACEA, and Eurydice.2016, 9f.
Eurydice 2015.
Loudova 2017.
MŠMT 2016.

Main types of provision

ECEC settings for under-3-year olds: Day nurseries (*jesle*) for children under 3 years of age, which previously came under the General Health Act and were primarily located in the larger towns, have been phased out. They are now being continued in different forms (*zařízení pro péči o děti do 3 let*)**, and many new kinds of provision are emerging. These are mostly open throughout the year and often are provided by employers of companies for their staff or by non-profit organisations. They are financed through parents' fees. Up to 20.11.2015, 61 such settings had been registered. The hours of attendance for each child are generally set out in a contract made with the parents.

Children's Groups (*dětská skupina*) were first established in November 2014 for children aged 1-6 years. In May 2016, 100 such groups were registered, attended by 1,465 children.

Like the settings for under-threes above, this type of provision is run by employers or non-profit agencies and come under the responsibility of the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs. However, this means that process quality and staff qualifications are not monitored in the same way as they would be in publicly run and state subsidised provision. These settings are currently generally attended by younger children, since lack of capacity makes it difficult for 2-year olds to be allocated a place in a publicly run kindergarten. The Children's Groups are therefore seen as an emergency solution by experts. However, these settings are expanding fast. Statistical data are available for the number of places provided (capacity), not, however, for the number of places used and the number of children enrolled. The work in the Children's Groups is similar to that in kindergartens. However, the requirements regarding building, hygiene and the conditions regarding process-oriented educational work are lower. Currently (June 2017) there are 300 groups providing 3,899 places.

Privately run childcare businesses for children under age 3 (*zařízení péče o děti do 3 let*) have been available since 2000 under the Small Trading Act for the care of under 3-year olds. By April 2015, 662 persons had registered a business termed “Day care for children under age 3”. However, older children may also attend these facilities. There is no legislative framework regarding staff/child ratios and group size (Eurypedia 2016). There are also no data available regarding participation rates. This kind of setting can be compared with family day care/group provision (in this case inspired by Germany). Since family day care and family day care staffing are not a specific focus of this report, they will not be referred to further.

A further new form of provision being developed as a pilot project of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs are the so-called **mini-crèches** for children aged 6 months up to 4 years. By October 2017, 68 such settings had been established, in which four children are cared for by a child minder**.

Kindergartens (*mateřské školy*) for 3- to 6-year olds are mostly run by local authorities but legally, they belong to the school system. Kindergartens are either full-day (6.5 to 12 hours daily) or half-day settings (up to 6.5 hours daily). There are also a number of kindergartens where children can stay overnight. Kindergartens are organised in both same-age groups and mixed-age groups. Children over the age of 6 whose school start has been deferred may also attend a kindergarten and, if capacity is sufficient, also children under age 3. In 2015/16, the under-threes accounted for 11.5% of children attending kindergartens. The year preceding school entry has been free of charge for parents since 2012. Since 2017 this also applies to children whose parents wish them to delay starting school and who spend a further year in kindergarten, whereas fees have to be paid for the other years.

Although kindergartens officially belong to the school system, annual opening times are organised so as to ensure that parents are guaranteed provision during the school holidays. Unlike schools, kindergartens do not close for two months in the summer. Instead, the municipalities draw up a co-ordinated plan of the opening times of local kindergartens, and children are then transported to the available kindergarten. For reasons of capacity, often only the children of working parents are admitted during the summer holidays.

In 2016/17, a total of 362,653 children were enrolled in 5,209 kindergartens (including 112 kindergartens for children with special educational needs), in which 31,002 ECEC practitioners were employed (99.4% of them women)* (MŠMT 2017, Table B2.1.1 and B2.2.1).

Preparatory classes (*přípravné třídy*) exist for children in the year before school entry. Whereas these classes were previously only for socially disadvantaged children, since September 2017 they are only for children whose parents wish them to delay school entry by a year. Depending on the region, they are often attended by children from Roma families. In 2014, 246 of these classes were located in primary schools, attended by 3,819 children and with 295 members of staff. 55 preparatory classes were part of a special school, where 46 staff members work with 268 children* (MŠMT 2017, Table B2.1.1 and B2.2.1).

Leisure time centres (*Dům dětí a mládeže*) provide various activities for children and young people (art, music, sport, language, activities for parents and their very young children, etc.). Some of these centres also run their own Children’s Groups for 1- to 6/7-year olds, which are mostly attended by younger children who have not been able to secure a place in a regular kindergarten because of capacity problems. These Children’s Groups often provide only a half-day place (8:00-13:00) and generally without provision of meals. The programme of activities is similar to that in regular kindergartens.

Sources: *MŠMT 2017.
European Commission, EACEA, Eurydice, and Eurostat 2014.
Eurydice 2016.
Eurypedia 2016.
**Infoportal Ministry for Employment and Social Affairs 2017.
Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports 2015.

Provider structures

The greater majority of kindergartens for 3- to 6-year olds are public institutions under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and run by municipalities and school authorities. In 2016/17, non-public kindergartens accounted for only 8.4% (0.9% church-affiliated, 7.5% private) of all kindergartens and only 3.6% of the age group were enrolled in such provision* (MŠMT 2017, Table B2.1.1, own calculations).

The providers of the Children's Groups (*dětská skupina*) for 1- to 6-year olds introduced in 2014 are either private companies, public and state organisations (municipalities, regional authorities), or non-profit agencies (church and/or philanthropical associations).

Sources: Bertram, T. and C. Pascal 2016
*MŠMT 2017.
Eurydice 2015.

Participation rates in regulated provision

The very low participation rate of under 3-year olds has risen only slightly to just under 3% since 2005 (*Table 1*). The majority of 3- to 6-year olds attend a kindergarten, although this proportion also increased only slightly between 2005 and 2015 (from 70% to 77.5%). Comparing the Eurostat data with national statistical data (*Table 2*), it seems that the participation rates for the under-threes represent only those children in *kindergartens*. There are no available data on participation rates in other forms of provision, only on the maximum capacity in terms of places.

Table 1

Czech Republic: Participation rates in ECEC centre-based settings by age and duration of attendance, 2005-2015*

Year	Weekly attendance	0 to under 3 years in %**	3 to compulsory school age in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	2	30
	Over 30 hours	0	40
	No attendance	98	30
2010	1 to 29 hours	2	32
	Over 30 hours	0	39
	No attendance	97	29
2015	1 to 29 hours	1.2	22.6
	Over 30 hours	1.7	54.9
	No attendance	97.1	22.5

Table 2

Czech Republic: Participation rates in kindergartens according to age, 2015/16**

Age	Proportion in relevant age-group
2-year olds	38.9
3-year olds	82.5
4-year olds	94.4
5-year olds	91.8
6-year olds	17.0
Over 6-year olds	0.2

According to assessments by the Czech Schools Inspectorate, the participation rate in kindergartens in 2014/15 was approximately 70%.

Sources: ČŠI 2016.
 *Eurostat 2015d, 2017f.
 **Eurydice 2016 (MŠMT).

Financing and costs for parents

ECEC settings for under-3-year olds are primarily funded through parental fees. Parents can apply for tax returns to offset part of their costs (in 2016 this amounted to 9,900 CZK (367€) per tax year, approximately the same as a basic wage). However, there is a huge difference between the costs incurred for attending a public kindergarten and those for using other forms of childcare provision. These settings are therefore mostly attended by younger children who, because of their age and the lack of public kindergarten places, have no other alternative.

Former day nurseries are funded partly by local authorities, but all other forms of provision are not granted state subsidies. Parents whose children attend a **Children's Group** or a setting regulated by the Small Business Act pay between 300 and 18,500 CZK monthly (between approx. 11€ and 685€, 06.06.2016). Private settings demand higher fees.

All other forms of childcare provision do not receive state subsidies and are funded through parental fees – the providers receive only tax benefits. This means that the fees for parents with children in state funded kindergartens are generally much lower than in other forms of ECEC provision.

In order to guarantee provision of additional places, financial resources have been made available since May 2016 through European Social Fund projects for Children's Groups and Small Business Act settings. 92 of the current total of 100 Children's Groups are receiving this kind of support. Altogether, 413 ECEC settings are being subsidised through EU projects, increasing capacity to 8,754 places.

The Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs conducted a survey in May 2016 on the level of parental fees in these 413 settings. The results indicate large disparities, and fees in the capital city are considerably higher than in other regions of the Czech Republic.

Table 3

Czech Republic: Parental fees for ESF-funded Children's Groups (0-6) and settings regulated by the Small Business Act (0-3), 2016*

	Children's Groups (0-6)		Settings regulated by the Small Business Act (0-3)	
<i>Prague:</i>				
Average monthly fees	6,466 CZK	240€	10,855 CZK	400€
Minimum and maximum	800-9,000 CZK	29-333€	3,000-18,500 CZK	111-684€
<i>Other regions:</i>				
Average monthly fees	3,114 CZK	115€	5,366 CZK	198€
Minimum and maximum	900-7,000 CZK	33-259€	300-16,000 CZK	11-592€

* B. Loudova, 06.06.2016, data from the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs

Kindergartens and **Preparatory classes** are the only state-maintained forms of ECEC, provided they are listed in the so-called Schools Register (*Rejstřík škol a školských zařízení*) and fulfil all the legal requirements (space, hygiene, staffing, etc.).

In publicly-run settings the centre head decides on the level of parental fees, which amount to approximately 33€ (plus roughly 1.16€ for meals), although the latter may vary according to the kind of food preferred (organic, vegetarian, etc.). Fees for private settings are considerably higher, on average 155€ (plus 1.81€ for meals). Service providers are granted tax concessions.

This is why the parental fees in kindergartens are overall considerably lower than in other forms of provision. The final year in kindergarten is free of charge, and parents only have to cover subsistence. Since January 2012, parents of a child who stays on for a year because of deferred school entry are obliged to pay the full fees for this additional year. Many kindergartens adjust the level of fees according to the children's age, with parents paying more for 5- and 6-year olds.

Sources: European Commission, EACEA, Eurydice, and Eurostat 2014.
Eurydice 2015.

Staff-child ratios

Ratio requirements vary according to the type of provision and group size.

Children's Groups (*dětská skupina*):

In the Children's Groups for 1- to 6-year olds, one member of staff is allocated to a maximum of six children, and at least two members of staff are present in groups between seven and 24 children. If a 2-year old is included in a group of between 13 and 24 children, then at least three staff members are in charge.

Kindergartens (*mateřské školy*):

Neither group size nor staff-child ratios are legally binding.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports recommends a minimum group size of 13 and a maximum of 24 children. Under exceptional circumstances, an additional 4 children may be included. Group size is related to the overall size of the setting and the specific situation in the municipality. One-group kindergartens can be established with a minimum of 15 children (and if there is only one kindergarten in a municipality, this requirement is reduced to 13 children). The group size requirement in kindergartens comprising two or more groups is 18.

In the kindergarten year 2015/2016, the average staff-child ratio was 13 children per staff member. Two core practitioners work in a regular group comprising 24 (28) children. However, they must not necessarily be in the group together all the time. The younger the children, the longer the period of overlap between the two staff members, although since 2017 this is usually at least 2½ hours daily. When undertaking visits outside the kindergarten, the maximum staff-child ratio is 1:20. In the kindergarten year 2014/15, the average group size was 23.4 children.

There is no requirement for a member of staff with a tertiary-level qualification to be present in a group of children.

Sources: ČŠI 2016.
EFA 2015.
European Commission, EACEA, and Eurydice 2016, 12.
Eurydice 2015.
MŠMT 2016.

Curricular Frameworks

There is no official curriculum guidance for work with children under age 3. The Small Business Act which regulates much of the **ECEC provision for under-3-year olds** refers to cognitive and language competencies, physical, art-related and cultural competencies, as well as health and safety. Service providers are required to develop an age-appropriate centre-specific programme.

Since 2007, **kindergartens** are required to follow the framework curriculum published by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (*Rámcový vzdělávací program pro předškolní vzdělávání*, 2004) and are expected to use this as the basis for developing a centre-specific programme. Some

kindergartens develop their own group-specific educational programmes, but this is not compulsory.

The national curriculum describes main objectives, didactic approaches and five learning areas, as well as staff responsibilities and evaluation criteria. The key competencies foregrounded are: learning and problem-solving competencies, communication and social/personal competencies, engagement and citizenship competencies. The five learning areas cover the following dimensions: (1) biological (the child and his/her body); (2) psychological (the child and his/her psyche: language, cognition, imagination, creativity, thinking, self-image, emotions, self-determination); (3) interpersonal (the child and others); (4) socio-cultural (the child and society); (5) ecological (the child and his/her world/environment).

Since 2012, a number of goals which children are expected to achieve by the end of their time in kindergarten have been outlined in more detail. These learning goals, which are in part controversial among experts, were published as an addendum to the national curriculum framework. However, they are not mandatory, but rather intended as a guide for pedagogical staff and parents.

Sources: Bertram, T. and C. Pascal 2016.
EFA 2015.
Eurydice 2015.

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

Inclusion and integrative education for all children is currently a much-discussed topic in the Czech Republic. If their parents so wish, children with a disability can attend a mainstream kindergarten which is listed in the Schools Register, where they receive the necessary pedagogical and psychological support.

There are also a number of special kindergartens (*speciální mateřské školy*) for children with disabilities, or special groups in mainstream kindergartens, mostly organised according to the specific disability. Some special kindergartens also have integrative groups attended by children with and without disabilities and which enable transition to a mainstream kindergarten and further individual integration procedures. In 2012/13, 110 kindergartens provided exclusively for children with special educational needs, attended by 3,383 children (approximately 1% of the kindergarten population). A further 4,499 children (1.3%) attended special groups in a mainstream kindergarten. 2,156 children with physical disabilities were included in a mainstream group setting.*

The Education Act uses the term *Children with special educational needs* as an umbrella category for different groups of children with a disability or disorder. A more specific categorisation is deliberately avoided, foregrounding the individual support provided for each child.

A variety of programmes and projects adopt an inclusive approach towards the integration of ethnic minorities and children from disadvantaged milieus, such as the *Step by Step* programme, which has been running since 1994. Roughly 150 kindergartens and primary schools work according to this innovative approach. Many kindergartens now include inclusive measures in their centre-specific educational programmes. A number of continuing professional development activities for kindergarten staff which support an inclusive approach are provided by non-governmental organisations.

The government provides kindergartens with a variety of options for supporting disadvantaged children. These include developing a special needs plan or an individual educational plan for the child, or employing an additional member of staff. However, the latter procedure still faces a number of organisational hurdles. Up to 2016, employing such support staff was an organisational feat. However, since the new Education Act came into force in 2016, measures have been intro-

duced not only to legally secure an individualised educational approach for each child, but also to provide support in terms of organisation and funding.

All ECEC settings can apply for participation in projects, for which they receive additional funding. For example, the organisation 'People in need' (*Člověk v tísni*) funds international projects with groups of socially disadvantaged persons such as Roma children and their families.

Children with a background of migration

In 2016, 4.5% of the population in the Czech Republic were classified as having a non-Czech background, whereby persons from Ukraine (2.16%), Slovakia (27.7%), Vietnam (11.8%) and the Russian Federation (7.2%) accounted for the largest groups***. Persons with a Roma background are categorised as belonging to an ethnic minority. However, there are no official figures. According to the most recent Census in 2011, 5,135 persons described themselves as persons with a Roma background, whereas qualified estimates claim that there are around 180,000 Roma people living in the Czech Republic.

The proportion of children under 6 years of age with a background of migration (3.1% in 2016**) is relatively low compared with that in other European countries. Almost three-quarters of these children come from non-EU28 countries***.

Sources: ***Czech Statistical Office 2016b.
*EFA 2015.
**Eurostat 2017g.
Eurydice 2015.

Monitoring – Evaluation – Research

Monitoring and evaluating early childhood education and care in kindergartens is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the local authorities and the regional school authorities. There is no legislative framework or regulatory requirement regarding the evaluation of work in settings for children under age 3.

Child-related monitoring in **kindergartens** does not take place against fixed standards of achievement or by comparing one child with another. However, staff are expected to observe the children regularly, to note emerging problems at an early stage and to estimate the kind of support needed. The Education Act requires each kindergarten to keep a 'group/class book' which documents the various educational activities. Entries into this book are confidential and only made available to other members of staff and parents.

At the national level, the Czech Schools Inspectorate (*Česká školní inspekce*) is responsible for approving kindergartens registered in the School Register and their inspection. Assessments focus on staff-child ratios, spatial conditions, hygiene and safety aspects, equipment, working conditions and staff qualifications, curriculum enactment and the kindergarten budget. Reports of the inspectorate are published online.

Each kindergarten is expected to develop its own evaluation system. Basic requirements for this are set out in the national curriculum (2004). The chosen evaluation system has to be described in the kindergarten's own educational programme.

Evaluation strategies usually comprise a number of dimensions (e.g. structural quality, process quality) which are assessed by key stakeholders (centre head, staff, parents). Self-evaluation measures are also carried out in public kindergartens. They are usually conducted by the centre head in order to assess the strengths and weakness of the setting and of the staff. Items reviewed include, e.g., the level of staff satisfaction, co-operation with the centre head and with parents, compliance with regulations, and working conditions. The most common methods, which can be freely chosen, include questionnaires, checklists and interviews.

Sources: Eurydice 2015.
OECD 2015.

Parental leave arrangements

Maternity leave (*mateřská dovolená*) is granted for six to eight weeks before the expected birth date and for 20 to 22 weeks afterwards. Payment for this period is 70% of daily earnings, up to a monthly maximum of 34.620 CZK (1.331€, 30.6.2017), under the condition that the mother has paid into a health insurance for at least 270 days over the previous two years. After the seventh week following the child's birth, fathers may also take leave, but have to take at least seven days. Mothers (or fathers) may continue to work during maternity leave, but not at the place of employment granting maternity leave.

Paternity leave is not a legal entitlement. Legislation drafted by the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs includes a week-long paternity leave entitlement during the first six weeks following birth and could come into force in 2018.

Both parents are able to take **parental leave** (*rodičovská dovolená*) up to the child's third birthday and may take turns during this period. However, only one parent can receive a parental benefit up to the child's fourth birthday. Parents may work while taking leave, also at their previous place of employment, as long as appropriate childcare arrangements are guaranteed.

Up to 2012, parents were able to choose between a 2-, 3- or 4-year parental leave. Since 2012, the overall length can be determined more flexibly. Parents decide how many months they wish to draw the parental benefit. The shortest option is up to the child's second birthday (24 months) and payment for this period is 70% of previous earnings (max. 11,500 CZK, 437€ per month). The longest option is up to the child's fourth birthday (48 months), but parental leave can only be taken up to the child's 3rd birthday. A maximum of 220,000 CZK (8.368€) is paid out for the whole period. Parents can decide to take the shortest option and then extend the length of leave if they so wish.

Only those mothers who are unable to fulfil the conditions for maternity leave (270 days health insurance) and where the father also has no health insurance, have no choice. They are automatically granted the 4-year option.

It is still rare (2015: 1.8%) for men to apply for parental leave allowance. No statistical data are available about the take up of parental leave. However, it can be assumed that most employed mothers return to work following the child's third birthday so that they do not lose their job. An increasing number of women choose the 2-year parental leave and then return to work, particularly in the cities. This is one of the reasons why the demand for ECEC provision for under-threes is growing, why so many new ECEC facilities have been opened in recent years, and why the number of 2-year olds in kindergartens is on the increase.

Source: Kocourková, J. 2017.

Historical highlights and shifts

1832	The first early childhood institutions are established in Prague
1869	Education units in schools are established, focusing on reading, writing and arithmetic. However, these are abolished following the ministerial decree of 1872 (see below).
1872	Kindergartens are included in an amendment of the 1868 Act and for the first time a distinction is made between educational institutions (<i>mateřské školy</i>) and care facilities (day

	nurseries and children's homes).
1948	Kindergartens are recognised as the first stage of the education system.
1955	The first compulsory curriculum for kindergartens is issued.
1960	Provision for under-threes comes under the auspices of the Ministry of Health and kindergartens for 3- to 6-year olds under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education.
1978	A unitary and compulsory curricular framework is issued both for day nurseries and kindergartens (a document which will later be expanded and elaborated).
Post-1989	The compulsory framework is no longer applicable; ECEC settings start developing their own curricular approaches, ones that respect humanist and democratic values and principles. Both classical concepts (Montessori, Waldorf) and contemporary programmes (Step by Step; health-promoting kindergartens, forest kindergartens) find their way into kindergartens. Massive cuts lead to the closing of almost all day nurseries and the dismantling or merging of many kindergartens.
2001	A National Curriculum is issued (the so-called White Book) which defines reforms for all stages of the education system, including kindergartens. A new national curricular framework for kindergartens is published (amended in 2004, 2016, 2017). Preparatory Classes are introduced in primary schools for children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.
2007	All state-maintained kindergartens are required to develop their own 'educational plan' in alignment with the national curricular framework.
2014	Age-integrated Children's Groups (<i>dětské skupině</i>) are established for 1- to under 7-year olds.
2015	Preparatory Classes are opened up for all children with special support needs.
2017	Enrolment in Preparatory Classes is restricted to children whose school start has been delayed. Since September 2017, kindergarten enrolment is obligatory for all children who turn five at the end of August for four hours per day. A further option is individual tutoring, mostly in the child's home.

Sources: Eurydice 2015.
Loudova, B. 2017.
Oberhuemer, P., I. Schreyer, and M.J. Neuman 2010.

Current challenges for the system of Early Childhood Education and Care in the Czech Republic

Country expert assessment by Barbora Loudová Stralczynská

Translating the inclusion agenda into practice

In September 2016, new regulations were issued for all schools and kindergartens. All educational institutions now receive government funding for support measures for children with special educational needs. This is the first time this has been systemically regulated. Currently, inclusion is a controversial and prejudice-laden topic in the general public, and sometimes differing and contradictory messages are given by politicians and the media. Early childhood educators are also not wholly free from prejudice, although inclusion has been practised for several years now in many schools and kindergartens. The 2016 amendment to the Education Act provides a framework for improving the process of individual support and inclusion in all educational institutions.

Expansion of places in kindergartens (or other appropriate forms of provision) for 2-year olds in particular and under 3-year olds in general

In order to achieve this goal, a systemic and multi-dimensional approach is needed. The two-year parental leave and related allowance are taken up by many parents, but there continues to be a lack of affordable childcare places for under 3-year olds.

Moreover, the government is planning to extend legal entitlement to a kindergarten place to 4-, 3- and 2-year olds (currently only for 5-year olds), which would lead to an even higher demand for places. However, it is expected that the child population will sink during the next few years, meaning that the lack of kindergarten places could become less severe. In the context of current social, family, economic and education policies, early childhood education and care for children up to age 6 presents a challenge for politicians which can no longer be ignored. It is not just a case of expanding provision, but also of ensuring quality and continuity in the children's educational biography. This is currently problematic owing to the lack of early childhood settings, particularly for the under-threes, and to the former lack of co-ordination in the overall system of early childhood education and care. However, this has improved over the past year and, particularly in the larger cities, there is a new focus on the quality of the settings for under-threes, although the Children's Groups, mini-crèches and other childcare settings still have a predominantly custodial function.

Introduction of compulsory attendance for the final kindergarten year

As from 2017 it will become compulsory for all children to attend a kindergarten in the year preceding school entry. Home-based education remains an option, but parents must apply for approval and agree to send their child to regular tests at a prescribed kindergarten (specific conditions are still to be agreed). It is assumed that this compulsory year will help to increase the attendance of children from socially disadvantaged families. However, experts have pointed out the likely low effects of this reform step and also the additional burden that it could bring on the one hand for kindergartens and staff, on the other hand for those families who would prefer to be able to take advantage of the usual freedoms possible in kindergarten, such as excusing children from attendance during a family holiday.

Demographic data

Population

In 2016, the population in the Czech Republic totalled over 10½ million (10,553,843). Following a decrease between 1995 (10,333,161) and 2005 (10,198,855), this represents an increase over the past decade.

Children under age 6

In 2016, 3.1% of the total population in the Czech Republic were children under 3 years of age. Children under 6 years of age accounted for 6.3% of the total population.

Table 4

Czech Republic: Proportion of children under age 6 in the total population, 2016*

Age group	Number
Total population	10,553,843
Under 1-year olds	110,777
1-year olds	111,185

Age group	Number
2-year olds	108,700
Total under 3-year olds	330,662
3-year olds	109,868
4-year olds	109,664
5-year olds	119,845
Total 3- to under 6-year olds	339,377
Total 0- to under 6-year olds	670,039

In 1995, the proportion of both under 3-year olds and of 3- to 6-year olds was above the EU average. By 2005 both had sunk below the EU average, whereas by 2016 they are slightly above the level of the EU28.

Table 5

Czech Republic: Children under 6 years of age – relative share in total population compared with EU average, 1995 to 2016, in %*

Age	1995	Ø EU15 ¹	2005	Ø EU25	2016	Ø EU28
Under 3 years	3,4	3,3	2,8	3,1	3.1	3.0
3 to under 6 years	3,7	3,5	2,6	3,1	3.2	3.1
0 to under 7 years	7,0	6,8	5,4	6,2	6.3	6.2

* own calculations, deviations due to roundings

Source: Eurostat 2017a.

Single households with children under age 6

The greater majority (around 82%) of all households with children under age 6 were couple households. In 2015, single parent households accounted for 6.2% of all households in the Czech Republic, most being single mother households (6%).

Table 6

Czech Republic: Households with children under 6 years of age, 2015

Household type	Number	Proportion of all households, in %
All households	1,183,600	
Couple households	969,000	81.9
Other household type	141,600	12.0
Single households, total	72,900	6.2
Single households, women	71,400	6.0
Single households, men	1,600	0.1

¹ The 1995 data are for the EU15 countries at the time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK); the 2005 data (EU25) also include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2014 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR.

Source: Eurostat 2017e.

Employment rates of parents with children under age 6

In 2015, the employment rates of men and women (15-64) in the Czech Republic were 77.9% and 62.4% respectively.

In the same year, 43% of all women with a child under 6 years of age participated in the labour market, whereas nearly all fathers (93%) were employed. The proportion of working mothers is thus the lowest among the EU28, whereas the proportion of working fathers is the highest.

Table 7

Czech Republic: Employment rates of parents with children under age 6 compared with other EU states, 2005-2015

		Mothers, in %	Fathers, in %
Czech Republic	2005	35.7	91.1
	2010	36.3	93.1
	2015	43.0	93.0
European Union	EU15 – 2005	56.2	90.0
	EU27 – 2010	58.2	86.6
	EU28 – 2015	61.0	87.3
Highest rate of employment	2005	Slovenia – 76.8	Cyprus – 95.3
	2010	Slovenia – 76.7	Netherlands – 93.5
	2015	Sweden – 78.9	Czech Republic/Malta – 93.0
Lowest rate of employment	2005	Malta – 29.3	Bulgaria – 72.4
	2010	Hungary – 32.7	Latvia – 74.8
	2015	Hungary – 38.8	Bulgaria – 77.3

Sources: Eurostat 2017b.
Oberhuemer, P., I. Schreyer, and M.J. Neuman 2010.

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion²

In 2015, 17.1% of children under 6 years of age were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This is significantly lower than the EU average (24.7%) for this age-group. The proportion of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 14.0%.

Source: Eurostat 2017d.

² 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:At_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion_\(AROPE\)](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:At_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion_(AROPE))

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