

2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Czech Republic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Czechia during the year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of threats of violence motivated by antisemitism.

The government took credible steps to identify and punish officials who committed human rights abuses.

Section 1.

Life

a. Extrajudicial Killings

There were no reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year.

b. Coercion in Population Control

There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

Under the 2022 Unlawful Sterilization Compensation Act, Romani women who were involuntarily sterilized between 1966 and 2012 were entitled to compensation of 300,000 koruna (\$14,000); however, observers claimed implementation of the law was problematic. In October, the Ombudsperson's Office criticized the Ministry of Health for compensation-related delays.

The League of Human Rights, Romani organizations, and activists called on the government to extend the unlawful sterilization compensation law beyond the January 2, 2025, deadline. In December, Justice Minister Pavel Blažek and Member of Parliament Eva Decroix submitted a proposed amendment to extend the deadline for processing compensations. As of September, the Ministry of Health had processed 1,381 out of 1,971 applications. It awarded compensation in 656 cases, rejected 496, and stopped processing 229. The longest processing time was 874 days. In July, the Supreme Administrative Court ordered the Ministry of Health to shift the burden of proof from victims to the ministry when documentation was previously lost or destroyed.

Section 2.

Liberty

a. Freedom of the Press

The law provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, and the government generally respected this right. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of expression, including for media members.

The law prohibited speech that incited hatred based on race, religion, class, nationality, or other group affiliation. It also limited denial of genocide, including the Holocaust, and Communist-era crimes. Individuals found guilty could face up to three years in prison. The law also applied to online, print, and broadcast media.

In 2023, courts convicted 22 persons of expressing sympathies for movements seeking to suppress human rights and freedoms; 11 for defaming a nation, ethnic group, race, or religion; nine for denying, questioning, approving, or justifying genocide; six for instigating hatred toward a group of persons or suppression of their rights and freedoms; and two for establishing, supporting, and promoting movements aiming to suppress human rights and freedoms.

Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure

Journalists covering allegations of corruption or conflicts of interest involving high-ranking state officials had sometimes faced online harassment from these officials. In some cases, journalists who pursued legal action against these officials had their complaints upheld.

On September 16, Reporters Without Borders accused the Czech Office for the Protection of Economic Competition (Antimonopoly Office) of initiating an investigation to intimidate the news website *Seznam Zprávy* after it investigated the chair of the Antimonopoly Office for allegedly working with a businessperson accused of manipulating subsidies.

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

The law provided workers the right to form and join independent unions of their choosing without authorization or excessive requirements. The law provided the right to associate freely for both citizens and foreign workers. Unions were apolitical and independent of the state, and the state did not interfere in their internal affairs.

The law allowed collective bargaining and prohibited antiunion discrimination. The law required reinstatement of workers fired for union activity and protected union officials from dismissal by an employer during their term of union service and for 12 months after its completion. Workers in most occupations had the legal right to strike if mediation efforts failed, and they generally exercised this right.

The government effectively enforced laws protecting freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike for workers. Penalties for violations of freedom of association and collective bargaining were commensurate with those for analogous crimes such as civil rights violations. Penalties were regularly applied against violators.

Forced or Compulsory Labor

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Acceptable Work Conditions

Wage and Hour Laws

The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs established and enforced minimum monthly wage standards. The minimum wage was greater than the “minimum subsistence cost,” which was defined as the minimum amount needed to satisfy the basic needs of a working-age adult for one month.

The law provided for a 40-hour workweek, two days of rest per week, and a 30-minute break during the standard eight-hour workday. Employees were entitled to at least 20 days of paid annual leave. Employers could require up to eight hours per week of overtime to meet increased demand but not more than 150 hours of overtime in a calendar year. Additional overtime was subject to the employee’s consent. The labor code required premium pay for overtime equal to at least 125 percent of average earnings.

Violations of wage, hour, and overtime laws were common in the wholesale, retail, food, hospitality, land transport, construction, machinery, and security services sectors.

Occupational Safety and Health

The government set occupational safety and health (OSH) standards appropriate for the country’s main industries. In addition to responding to workers’ OSH complaints, responsibility for identifying unsafe conditions remained with State Bureau for Labor Inspections (SBLI) inspectors, who had the authority to make unannounced visits and initiate sanctions. Workers had the right to remove themselves from dangerous situations without jeopardy to their employment.

SBLI inspectors typically focused on sectors with high-risk working conditions, such as construction, agriculture, forestry, handling of hazardous chemicals, and transport.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

The government effectively enforced minimum wage, overtime, and OSH laws. Penalties for violations were commensurate with those for similar crimes, such as fraud or negligence. Penalties were regularly applied against violators.

Inspections for compliance with the minimum wage and hour laws were one of the primary objectives of SBLI inspectors. While SBLI inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions such as fines against employers, employees seeking assistance with individual entitlements from their employers (e.g. recovery of past due wages, disputes about invalidity of certain legal acts such as termination by notice) had to seek judicial recovery through the court system. Inspection and remediation, and the number of SBLI inspectors, were sufficient to enforce general compliance with wage, hour, and OSH laws.

According to the *Informal Economy in Czech Republic 2023* study conducted by the global consulting firm A.T. Kearney, Friedrich Schneider at Johannes Kepler University, together with VISA Europe, the informal economy accounted for approximately 14 percent of the country’s GDP.

The government generally enforced labor laws in this sector.

c. Disappearance and Abduction

Disappearance

There were no reports of enforced disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

Prolonged Detention without Charges

The law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements.

In most cases, police used judicial warrants to arrest individuals accused of criminal acts. Police could make arrests without a warrant when they believed a prosecutable offense was committed, when they regarded arrest as necessary to prevent further offenses or the destruction of evidence, to protect a suspect, or when a person refused to obey police orders to move.

The law required police to refer individuals arrested on a warrant to a court within 24 hours. A judge had an additional 24 hours to decide whether to continue to hold the individuals. For suspects arrested without a warrant, police had 48 hours to inform them of the reason for the arrest, question them, and either release them or refer them to a judge who had to decide within 24 hours whether to charge them. Authorities could not hold detainees for a longer period without charge. The law provided for bail except in cases of serious crimes or to prevent witness tampering. A defendant in a criminal case could request a lawyer immediately upon arrest. If a defendant could not afford a lawyer, the government provided one. Authorities generally respected these rights.

In July, the European Commission referred the country to the Court of Justice of the EU for failing to comply by 2016 with a directive on the right to attorney access and the right to inform a third party of liberty deprivation after arrest, despite a formal notice sent in 2021 and a reasoned opinion issued in 2023.

In June, the European Court of Human Rights unanimously found the country's practice of doubling pretrial detention judicial review times for juveniles as compared to adults violated the prohibition of discrimination against juvenile applicants on the basis of age, as described in the Council of Europe's European Convention on Human Rights.

d. Violations in Religious Freedom

See the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/international-religious-freedom-reports/>.

e. Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Section 3.

Security of the Person

a. Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The law prohibited such practices, but there were credible, isolated reports of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment by police and prison guards. Impunity was not a significant problem in the security forces.

In July, four guards from Ruzyně Prison in Prague stood trial for their roles in physically assaulting and coercing an inmate to sign a disciplinary offense confession in 2022. Two guards committed the assault, while two were bystanders during the incident, which occurred in a room without security cameras. All four guards faced up to five years in prison for their respective charges of abuse of official authority and extortion or failing to prevent the abuse.

b. Protection of Children

Child Labor

The law prohibited the worst forms of child labor. The minimum age for employment was 15, but employment of children between ages 15 and 18 was subject to strict safety standards, limitations on hours of work, and the requirement that work not interfere with education.

The SBLI effectively enforced these regulations. Penalties were commensurate with those for analogous violations and were regularly applied against violators. There was no significant presence of the worst forms of child labor.

Child Marriage

The minimum legal age for marriage was 18. The law allowed for marriage at age 16 with court approval. Authorities effectively enforced the law.

c. Protection to Refugees

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern.

Provision of First Asylum

The law provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government had a system for providing protection to refugees.

The Ministry of Interior, through a private law firm, nongovernmental organizations, and international organizations, monitored the Prague Airport for potential asylum seekers.

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

There were an estimated 10,000 Jews in the country, approximately 3,000 of whom were registered members of the Federation of Jewish Communities. Expressions of antisemitism in public were rare, but small, well-organized groups with antisemitic views were active. Antisemitic hate speech on the internet increased and constituted the majority of antisemitic incidents in the country. The Ministry of Interior monitored the activities of such groups and cooperated with police from neighboring countries as well as the local Jewish community.

In January, the Supreme Court confirmed a lower court verdict that found the Bodyart Press publishing house guilty of Holocaust denial by publishing a Czech translation of David Hoggan's book, *The Myth of the Six Million*. The court fined the publishing house 45,000 koruna (\$1,900) and its executive 15,000 koruna (\$650).

The Federation of Jewish Communities (FJC) assessed global events, including the October 2023 attacks by Hamas on Israel and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, contributed to an increase in antisemitic incidents.

According to the 2024 FJC annual report on antisemitism, 4,304 antisemitic incidents occurred in 2023, an increase of 90 percent over the 2,265 incidents in 2022, and 282 percent over the 1,128 incidents in 2021. The largest increase was in online antisemitic hate speech, which accounted for 99.6 percent of the incidents. Under a five-year "counterextremism" and hate crime strategy, the government conducted a public awareness campaign and provided specialized training to law enforcement personnel.

The country was one of the initial endorsers of the Global Guidelines for Countering Antisemitism and expressed interest in making sure that the best practices listed within were implemented.

For further information on incidents in the country of antisemitism, whether or not those incidents were motivated by religion, and for reporting on the ability of Jews to exercise freedom of religion or belief, see the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/international-religious-freedom-reports/>.