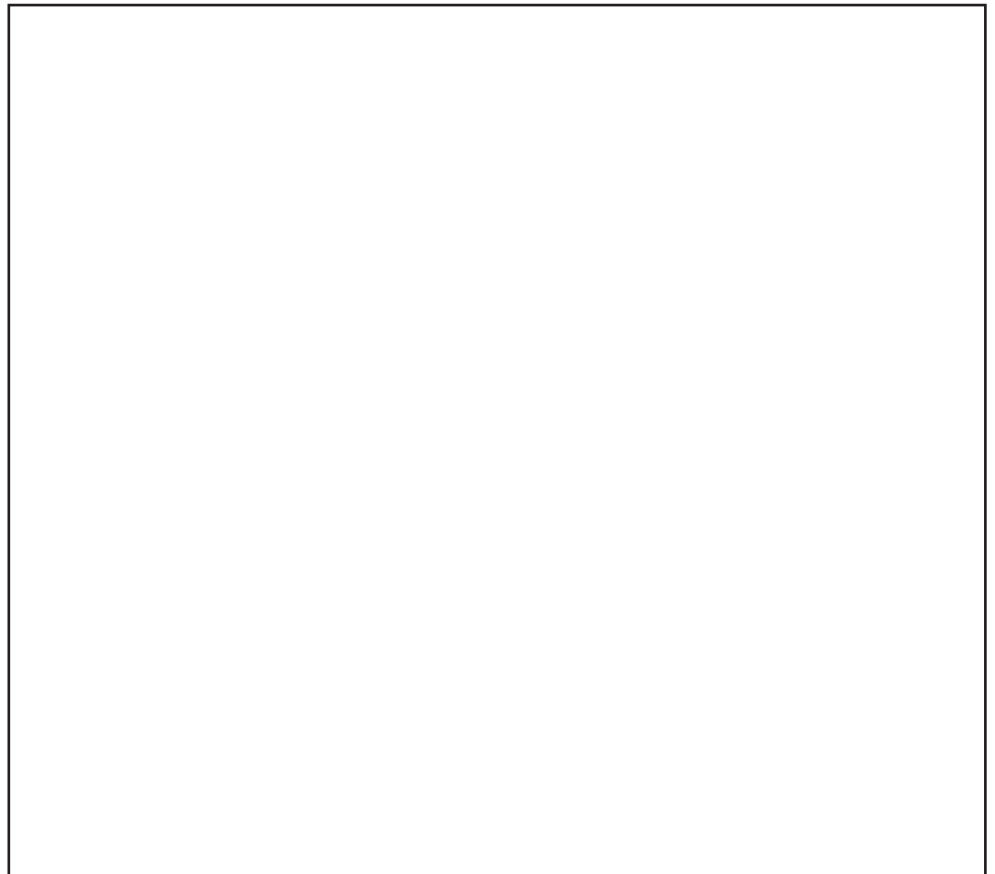




Eurofound

Impact of the recession on age management policies: Czech Republic



Labour market developments and the ageing workforce

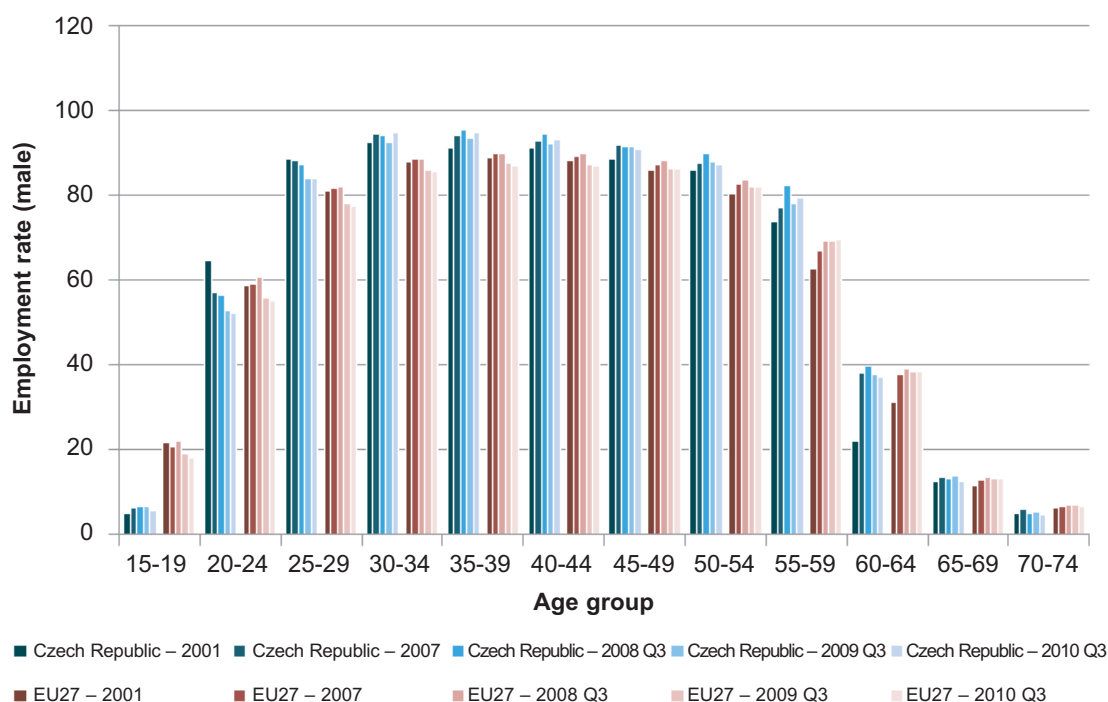
Employment rates

Over the last 10 years, the total employment rate in the Czech Republic has stagnated somewhat compared to the average across the EU, but fallen behind the Nordic countries, the United Kingdom, Germany and Austria. Nonetheless, there has been significant employment growth in the relatively weak services sector.

The Czech labour market has seen some changes in terms of both gender and age structure. The employment rate of younger people (men and women) aged 15–24 has been relatively stable over the last decade and there has been a drop in participation in the age group 20–24. This reflects longer periods in full-time education which, in principle, filter through to workforce skills and growth potential. There has been a rapid increase of the employment rates for the 55–59 and 60–64 age groups – the employment rate of men aged 55–59 rose from 51.6% in 2001 to 67.2% in 2010. However, the employment rate of men over 60 remains below the EU average – in 2010, men aged 60–64 in the Czech Republic had an employment rate of 25.1% compared to the EU average of 30.8%. The employment rate of women is also below the EU average. Overall, for both men and women the employment rate was decreasing up until 2007 and it is now at the level comparable to the late 1990s. These data inform us that the reserves of labour in the Czech Republic are principally among young cohorts, some groups of prime-age women and older cohorts (OECD, 2010).

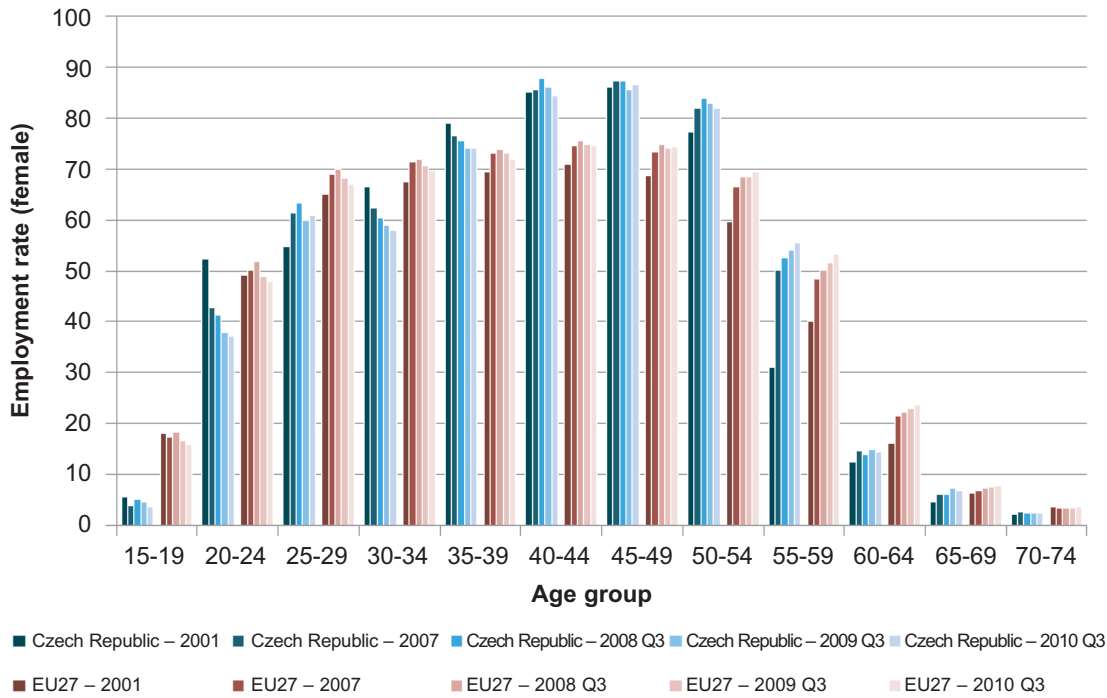
For a detailed overview from 2001 to 2010, see Figures 1 to 3.

Figure 1: Men's employment in the Czech Republic and EU27 by age group, 2001–2010 (%)



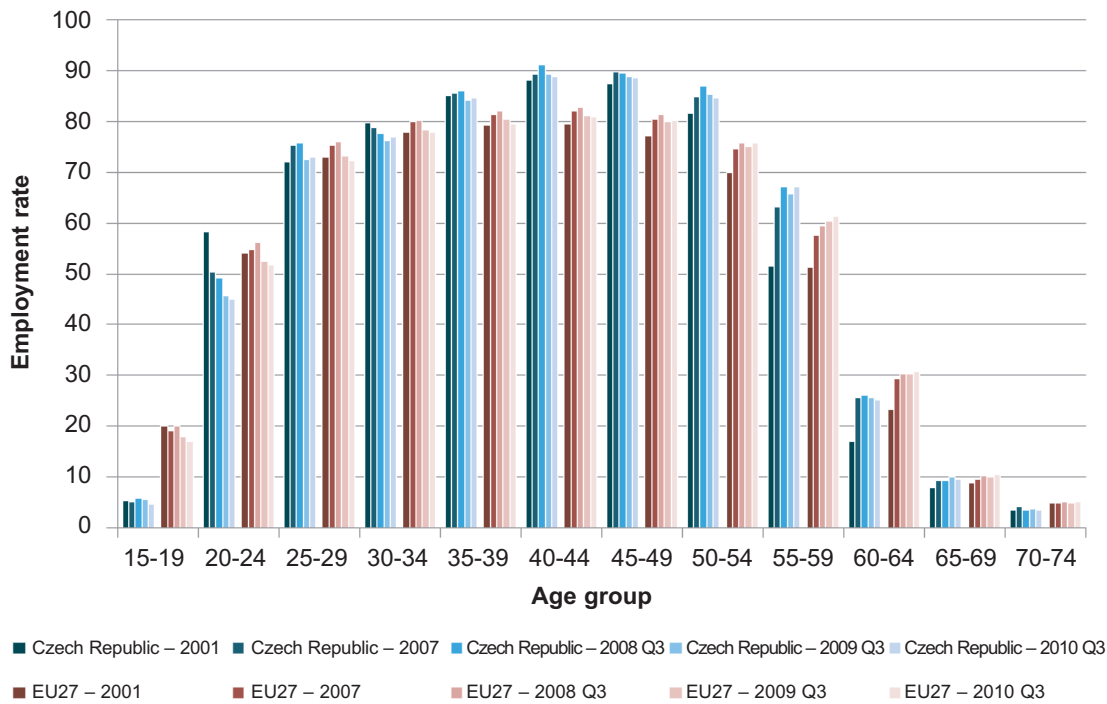
Source: Eurostat

Figure 2: Women's employment in the Czech Republic and EU27 by age group, 2001–2010 (%)



Source: Eurostat

Figure 3: Employment rates in the Czech Republic and EU27 by age group, 2001–2010 (%)



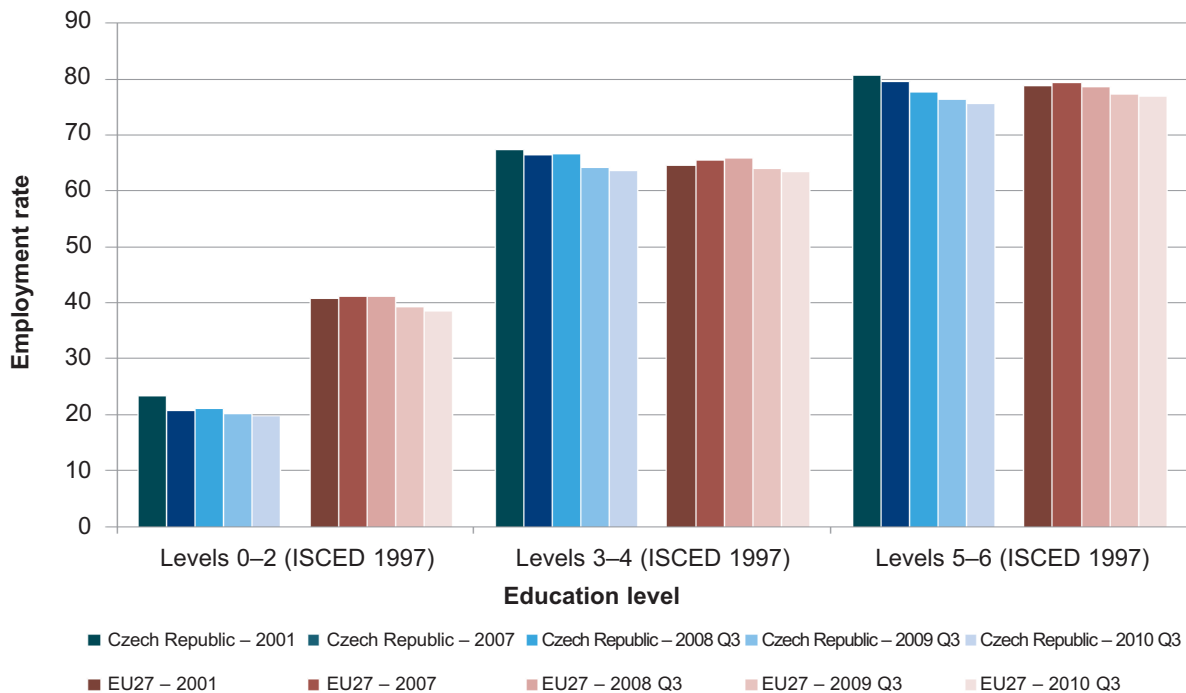
Source: Eurostat

Impact of education on employment

Looking at the educational levels of the workforce overall, the Czech Republic ranks among those countries with a strong secondary education. The proportion of adults in the country with at least secondary education is the highest in the EU (over 91%). The small proportion of the population with below secondary education levels is reflected in the Czech labour market where workers with the most basic education level (ISCED 0–2) comprise only 5.3% of total employed. The largest represented educational groups in the workforce overall are workers with lower secondary and secondary education (ISCED 3–4, 40% and 38%). Overall, 17.2% of workers had achieved the highest educational level (ISCED 5–6) in 2010.

In terms of the extent to which people of different educational levels are employed, we can see that there is also a strong positive correlation between educational level and employment rate. Employment rates for groups with secondary, post-secondary and tertiary education is comparable to the EU average. Employment rates for those with primary and lower education is about half of the EU average. The changes in employment rates with educational level are illustrated in Figure 4. As in other EU countries, labour force participation grows with educational level obtained. The lowest participation rate, significantly below the EU average, encompasses the low-qualified or those without any formal qualifications.

Figure 4: *Employment in the Czech Republic and EU27 by education level, 2001–2010 (%)*



Note: Educational levels are as defined by UNESCO’s International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 1997).
Source: Eurostat

Employment by age and gender

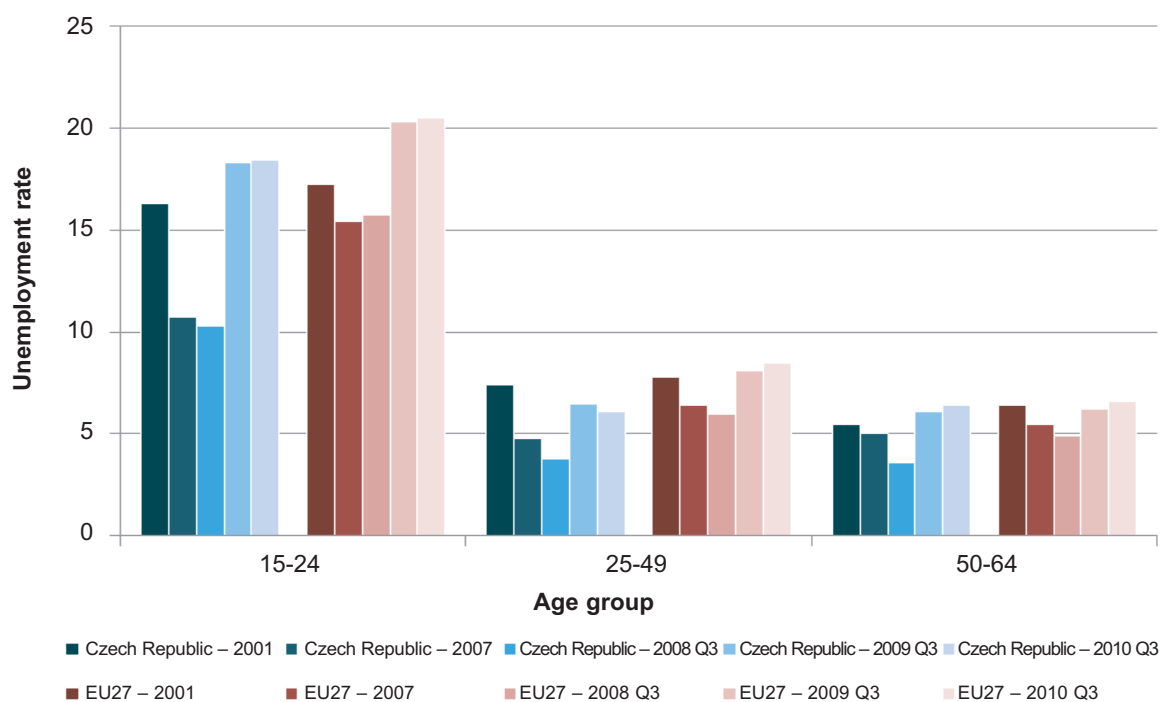
Compared to the EU, the Czech Republic had an above average labour force participation for men and women for the period up until 2005 (72.2% for men and 55.6% for women). The situation has changed in recent years, and (contrary to the EU trend) it has been declining slightly due to a slightly lower participation rate of women. The proportion of economically active women has dropped slightly to 54.5% in 2010. In terms of context for this, it is useful to be aware that the Czech Republic inherited an above average participation rate of women from the period before the transition and thus this decrease was an expected consequence of the economic transformation after 1989.

However, an important issue to consider here is the relatively low employment rate of prime-age women (25–39 years old). The employment rates of the age groups 25–30 and 30–35 are 60.9% and 58% respectively in 2010 compared to close to 85% for the cohorts aged 40–50. These groups in the 25–39 age bracket often spend several years out of the labour market when they raise children (men take parental leave only in a very small number of households). Childcare responsibilities and lack of part-time opportunities make it more difficult to return to employment before children reach pre-school age. However, it is clear by the larger participation numbers for women above 40 years of age that reintegration does happen.

Unemployment rates

Despite the growth in unemployment in 2009 due to the economic downturn, the total unemployment rate in the Czech Republic was still among the lowest in the EU in 2010. Nevertheless, there is now a growing risk of high long-term unemployment, growing unemployment among young workers and substantial regional differentiation. A recent increase in youth unemployment (15–24 years old) from 10.3% in 2008 to over 18.4% in 2010 is clearly visible in Figure 5 and can be attributed to the economic crisis of 2009. The most affected group were young school-leavers, but older workers were also affected slightly above the average (an increase in age group 50–64 from 3.6% in 2008 to 6.4% in 2010). However, growth of unemployment in the older age group has been curtailed to some extent by early retirement schemes.

Figure 5: Unemployment in the Czech Republic and EU27 by age group, 2001–2010 (%)

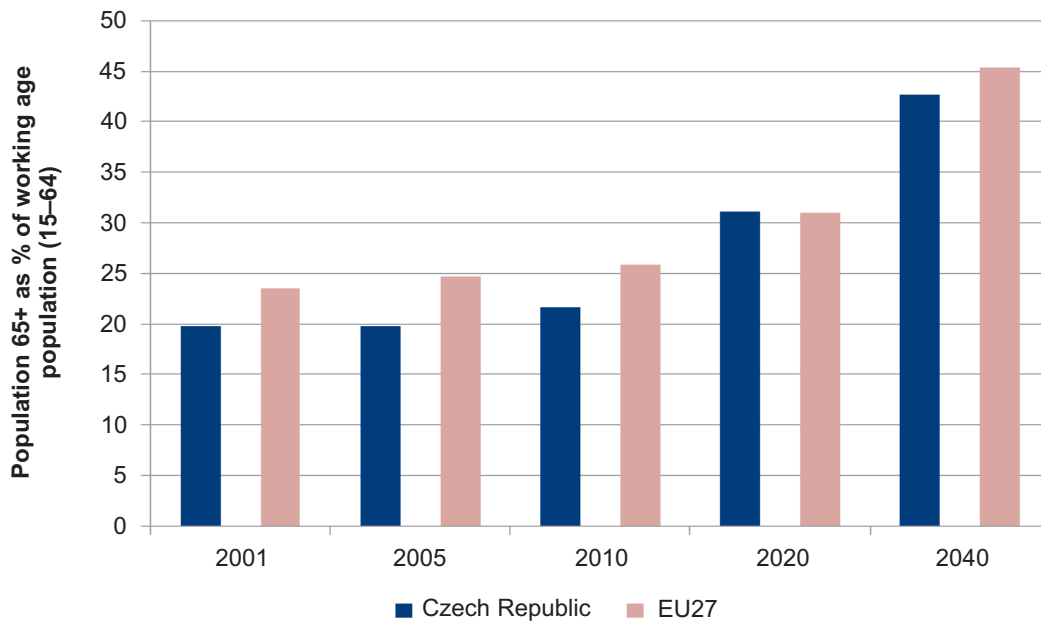


Source: Eurostat

Old-age dependency ratio

The Czech Republic has not faced the same pressure on the productive population in terms of the old-age dependency ratio as other EU countries have (as shown in Figure 6). The extent of the dependency is currently below the EU average and ranges from 19.8% to 21.6% from 2005–2010. In this respect, the Czech Republic shows similar patterns to the former socialist countries with relatively young populations. It is, however, very likely that an ageing population is going to be an issue, since, according to Giannakourise (2008), the dependency ratio is expected to grow to 61% between 2020 and 2060 (which is above the expected EU average).

Figure 6: Current and forecast old-age dependency ratio in the Czech Republic and EU27, 2001–2040



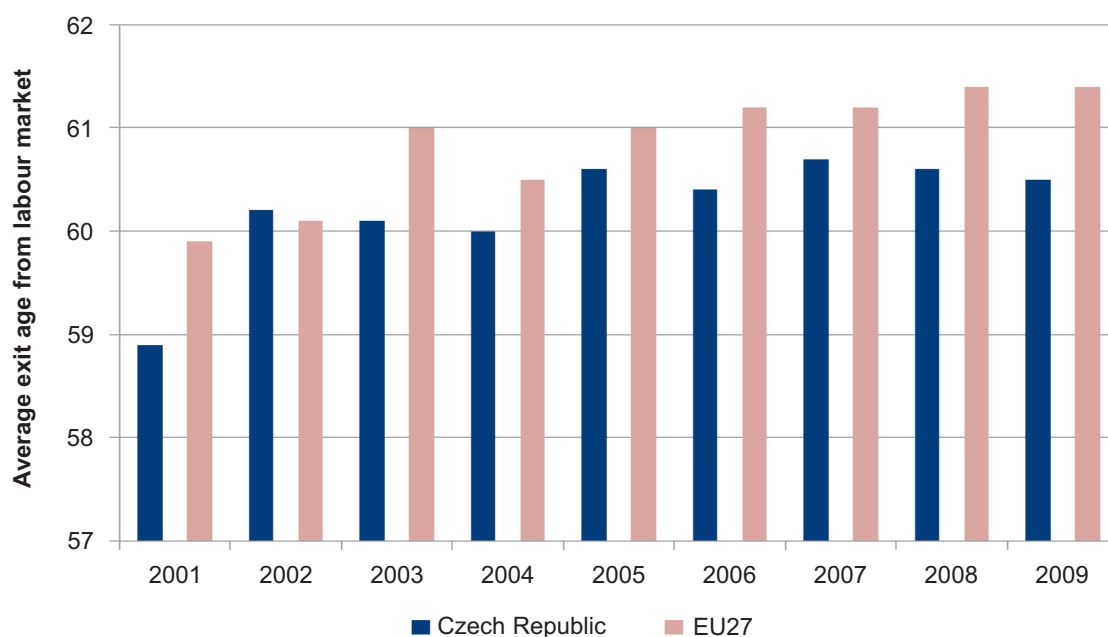
Source: Eurostat

Exit from the labour market

Turning to the early retirement schemes in the Czech Republic, we can see that these have been used relatively frequently. Despite efforts to keep older workers in the labour market until the statutory retirement age (which is 65 years for men and women with one child, 64 years for women with two children, 63 for women with three children and 62 for women with four and more children), there is still an opportunity to take early retirement for those who prefer to leave the labour market. The frequency of the use of early retirement can be seen from the fact that up to 33% of all new pensions in 2005 were started up using such schemes, particularly by low-income workers (Kotíková and Remr, 2007). This general trend was reinforced by the economic crisis of 2008–2010 in the case of men in the manufacturing sector.

Early retirement is used, in some cases, to avoid making redundancies among older workers. According to Eurostat, in 2008 and 2009, the average age for labour market exit for men was 62.3 years and 61.5 years respectively, which is around the EU average. By contrast, this went slightly up for women with the average exit age for women being 59 years in 2008 and being 59.6 years in 2009 which is still below the EU average (see Figure 7). There is no overall clear trend with respect to male labour market exit age over the last decade. The 2008 level is nearly the same as in 2002, and there is some fluctuation between years. In terms of female labour market exit age, there is a more stable upward trend.

Figure 7: Average exit age from the labour market in the Czech Republic by age group, 2001–2009



Source: Eurostat

Direction of policy development (2000–2008)

There is a disparity to some extent in the Czech Republic between the stated government policy and the actual organisational practice of age management initiatives. Although increased government attention has been given and considerable progress has been made, there is a prevailing negativity in the public and political discourse in relation to this area. Population ageing has, for example, from time to time been publicly presented as a socioeconomic threat and a compelling driving force for changes of the social system, particularly for the pension reform.

Challenge of workforce ageing

The Czech government and its social partners have paid increased attention to the issue of population ageing and related challenges from the beginning of the new millennium. In 2002, the government proposed directions and measures for tackling the process of population ageing (including an ageing workforce¹) in the strategic document entitled ‘Národní program přípravy na stárnutí pro roky 2003 až 2007’ (National programme of preparations for ageing for 2003–2007).

In 2006, the Government Council for Older Persons and Population Ageing (Rada vlády pro seniory a stárnutí populace) was established to create conditions for active and dignified ageing and participation of older people in the socioeconomic development of the country. Its members include government representatives from relevant departments, social partner representatives, representatives of regions, towns and municipalities, representatives of social services providers and insurance companies, and representatives of organisations for older people. The council’s main priorities

¹ The term ‘ageing workforce’ has not been used regularly in the Czech Republic. If mentioned, it is usually in relation with the EU agenda.

in the labour market sphere are to support old-age entrepreneurship and employment, to fight against age discrimination and to develop collaboration between social partners. It also helps employers to formulate and implement their own strategies towards recruiting and retaining older employees. In 2007, the Council prepared the new ‘National programme of preparations for ageing for 2008–2012’, which was passed by the government in January 2008. The programme includes strategic aims to support older workers’ participation in the labour market. It covers four main areas: education, the social security system, employment policy and social partnerships (for example, introduction of financial motivation for employers and employees or raising awareness of best practices in age management). However, it lacks concrete measures in relation to labour market issues and employment.

Furthermore, there is currently a government-sponsored age management pilot project underway with the aim to disseminate information about age management and support the adoption of age management approaches in Czech companies’ human resources policies.

Pension system

Turning to the actual practice of age management strategies, it is clear that pensions and the labour market situation of older workers have been part of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs’ agenda for a long time, especially in connection to the EU labour policy agenda (interviewee, SP ČR).

The Czech pension system is based on two pillars.² Firstly, the mandatory basic pension insurance is funded on a pay-as-you-go basis with defined benefits on the basis of years of contributions (PAYG). A full pension requires 25 years of coverage, but people with 15 years contributions may receive a reduced pension from age 65. The earnings related pension gives 1.5% of earnings for each year of contributions (using a progressive formula). The minimum pension benefit amounts to CZK 2,080 (about €85). Older people are covered by the general social-assistance scheme and related benefits in kind. The system is universal and provides for all economically active individuals; there are no industry-specific schemes in the legal regulations apart from some variations in the so-called electric power sectors. The pension from the basic pension insurance is drawn by more than 99% of the population in the retirement age.

Secondly, there is a voluntary complementary pension insurance scheme with state contributions. Employees make contributions (a minimum monthly amount of CZK 100 (about €4) is required) to a pension fund, which the state matches to a certain threshold. Employers can pay part or all of the employees’ contribution and contributions are often part of collective bargaining agreements. Around 27% of all employers pay into voluntary pension plans. Approximately 60% of economically active people have their own supplementary pension insurance (not including individuals already at retirement age).

Reform measures

Since 2003, several changes have been introduced by the government.³ The last extensive package of measures was passed in August 2008 by the previous socialist government as a policy aimed at raising fertility. It included an increase in the retirement age, which is now 65 years for men and women with one child born after 1968, 64 years for women with two children, 63 years for women with three children and 62 for women with four and more children. For those

² See <http://www.mpsv.cz/en/1606>.

³ The measures tightened the conditions for early retirements, invalidated early retirement, made work beyond retirement age more attractive, gradually increased the retirement age and added an option of a parallel track whereby an individual could remain economically active and still receive an old-age or disability pension.

born before 1968 the old arrangement applies.⁴ For those born between 1936 and 1968, the statutory retirement age increases gradually by two months for every year since 1936 – for example, the retirement age for men born in 1941 is 61 years (60 years + 12 months). Also, the new measures included an increase in the minimum coverage for those aged 25–35 years by introducing a non-contributory period covered by the state. From 2010, the state has not covered the insurance for students in secondary and tertiary education and their study period is not thus recognised as relevant for benefit calculation (ČSSZ, 2009).

Public debate on the next phase of pension reform is ongoing. A major change would be a voluntary opt-out from the current PAYG system that will enable people to transfer a certain percentage (3%) of their pension contribution to private pension funds instead. However, according to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs representative (interviewee, MPSV) this reform has not moved onto the agenda in reaction to the economic crisis, though the crisis may have accelerated the reform. The main driver for change is the projected population ageing and its impact on the sustainability of the current system and fiscal stability. The pension deficit under current arrangements will reach 100% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2050.

To encourage older workers to remain in the labour market, the government introduced some further pension reforms. Prior to 2008, older workers had three options:

- to leave the labour market and receive a state pension (a full pension is given after 25 years of employment-related contributions);
- to stay in the labour market, postpone receiving a pension (disability or old-age) and thus increase the pension through an increased contribution;
- to stay in the labour market and receive a pension simultaneously if the employment is temporary with a maximum length of one year.

In 2009, this third option was abolished and a new option has been introduced. From 2009, people at retirement age were allowed to continue their economic activity to the full extent and receive one-half of a pension. For the years deferred beyond the normal pension age, the pension amount increases more than in the case of the old option three (see details in OECD, 2009). These measures aimed to postpone retirement and to support gradual leave by increased use of temporary employment (unrestricted in length). The option to retire three years before the standard retirement age remains for all insured persons.

The disability pension scheme has also undergone reform in recent years. The conditions of eligibility have changed and the degree of disability is now assessed according to the degree of incapacity (three categories of disability). Although age alone is not considered in the assessment, older age brings limitations that can lessen the ability to work and older people constitute a majority of disability pension beneficiaries. The reclassification of disability led to a reduction or loss of disability status for a considerable share of formerly eligible people in pre-retirement age. These groups usually become unemployed due to health restrictions and long-term exclusion from the labour market (Bruthansová and Jeřábková, 2010).

⁴ The statutory retirement age for men born before 1936 had been 60 years, for women without children 57 years, with one child 56 years, with two children 55 years, with three and four children 54 years and with five and more children 53 years.

Laws and regulations shaping labour market experience

As well as the Pension Insurance Act, economic activity of older workers is also regulated by economic policy in general and employment policy in particular. The Czech Republic has limited incentive schemes for employers to employ older workers. To date, incentives address mainly the supply side of the labour market and apply only to those at retirement age (as detailed in option three above) or unemployed (see below). There are a small number of incentive schemes for employers to employ individuals in the pre-retirement age bracket and supporting, system-wide, policy measures have been absent so far (Kotíková and Remr, 2007).

In 2004, the new Employment Act has been adopted with substantial impact on workers aged 50 and older. This age group has been newly categorised as a high-risk group receiving particular attention from the Labour Office within an active and passive labour market policy. This group is entitled to receive unemployment benefits for an extended period of one year (as opposed to the standard six-month period) and a compulsory individual action plan for quick reentry to the labour market.⁵ If a retraining programme and/or other measures fail, subsidised jobs are offered to the unemployed and their wage is covered for one year by the Labour Office instead of the employer. Several programmes targeted at the unemployed aged 50+ have been carried out by the Labour Office since 2004. For example, a pilot project called 'Third career' (*Třetí kariéra*) was introduced, supported by the European Social Fund and the Czech government with large companies (such as Škoda Auto a.s. and Delvita a.s.). The project with the slogan 'Training rather than early retirement' concentrates on workers aged 50+ and had two parts: training programmes for middle management aged 50+ and a consultancy programme for personnel managers (Vidovičová, 2007). These measures and programmes were carried out in relation to the European Employment Strategy under the National Employment Action Plans framework, which were later replaced by national reform programmes.

Anti-discrimination legislation also has had an impact on old-age employment. Since 2001, several qualitative and quantitative surveys on age discrimination have been carried out by Lucie Vidovičová and her colleagues. Part of the surveys pay attention to the labour market where the authors set out the extent of age discrimination in the Czech Republic. However, they note the relative decrease in the number of recorded cases of age discrimination between the years 2003 and 2007 which is interpreted as a success for anti-discriminatory legislation prohibiting age discrimination in the labour market (Vidovičová and Rabuši, 2005; Vidovičová, 2008). In 2009, a new Anti-discrimination Act came into force specifying equal treatment and prohibition of age discrimination in the labour market (Tomečková, 2010). These issues were insufficiently covered by the previous Labour Code.

Social dialogue

Since the early 1990s, the most important arena for discussing regulations affecting business and employment policy has been the tripartite body, the Council of Economic and Social Agreement. It was established as a platform for social dialogue among the government, trade unions and employers, and meets quarterly. Social partners also regularly consult on draft government bills and participate in various governmental committees and commissions. It is hard to assess the impact of social dialogue solely on the basis of the opinion of social partners, because employers, trade unions and government have different perspectives on the process. While government representatives consider the involvement of social partners in policy-making as sufficient, employer and trade union representatives perceive their role as unsatisfactory. However, it depends on the particular agenda and context. In addition, the tripartite agenda related to population ageing has been restricted to the pension reform only and there is no particular body addressing other wider issues relating to older workers.

⁵ The plan is optional for other (non-risk) groups.

Monitoring and evaluation of policy

The impact of these policy measures on the older population has not been systematically monitored and evaluated at the central level of government. According to the interviewed government representative, monitoring is carried out by the public authorities in charge of a given policy (for example, the Labour Office, Czech Social Security Administration) and the data collected are regularly analysed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. However, social partners may not know about the evaluation and may not have been informed about the outcomes. Sporadically, academic researchers are involved in evaluation work, such as in Sirovátka and Kulhavý's recent evaluation of selected active labour market measures (Sirovátka and Kulhavý, 2007; Kulhavý and Sirovátka, 2008).

Crisis effects on recent policy initiatives

Impact on the economy

The Czech Republic was not hit as hard by the global economic crisis as other EU Member States. Export-dependent industry sectors, especially the automobile industry, the smelting industry and the manufacturing of glass, have been most affected. After the initial period, the crisis also hit the construction industry, transport sector and tourism. Small and medium enterprises have been affected considerably more than large companies. The impact has been more significant in sectors with a predominant male labour force. The Czech Republic had a comparative advantage in that it had a sound financial sector and a relatively low level of public and household debt (Švejnar, 2009). For this reason, the crisis in the Czech Republic was not a financial one and has been mostly characterised by a reduction of exports (which creates up to 80% of the country's GDP). Moreover, the annual drop in GDP during the crisis was relatively modest. The registered unemployment rate reached its peak in February 2010 (nearly 10%). Temporary agency workers, unqualified and lower qualified members of the labour force, workers suffering from frequent illness, and older workers were the first to be dismissed in industry. Despite government effort, a large increase in early retirement was recorded. However, the most affected by the crisis were young workers and school-leavers.

Government anti-crisis measures

The Czech government has not significantly changed existing social policies in connection with the economic crisis, but it introduced particular measures (for all workers, including older employees) to adapt to the new situation. The main part of the government anti-crisis measures prepared by the National Economic Council focused on the company level and on the labour force as a whole. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs adopted a number of anti-crisis measures, for example, national insurance premium discounts for employers (terminated in 2010) and two projects financed by the European Social Fund called 'Educate yourself' and 'Training is a chance'. These projects were focused on employee training. A further change was the new arrangement of the Insolvency Act. This enhanced the chances of employees to make wage claims (including severance pay) related to employer insolvency.

Furthermore, the ministry increased the budget of the Labour Office responsible for employment policy implementation. Extra funds were used for consultancy, retraining and the creation of the subsidised jobs discussed earlier. The number of personnel in the Labour Office increased and the new officers were paid by the European Social Fund (MLSA, 2010).

The government also proposed an increase in the support period for unemployed people as well as an increase of the replacement rate of unemployment benefits, but these considerations were halted under the wider public finance reform (OECD, 2010). Partial unemployment, whereby employees faced with redundancy received wage compensation from the government and remained in formal employment, was also used to manage redundancies (Doleželová, 2009). In return, these employees were required to attend training courses.

Position of the social partners

Social partners intensively discussed economic problems relating to the crisis at plenary meetings of the tripartite body, namely the Council of Economic and Social Agreement. At the beginning of the crisis, employee representatives (represented by the Czech-Moravian Confederation of the Trade Unions) cooperated closely to try and mitigate the impact on the economy in general and on employees in particular. Later on, the trade unions as well as employer representatives increasingly criticised the steps government took. They were concerned that these measures focused only on public expenditure cuts. Social partners eventually reached an agreement and prepared the tripartite pack of anti-crisis measures in spring 2010. The whole pack included 38 steps (MPSV, 2009–2011), and those focused on employment and unemployment were related to all age groups of the labour force collectively; in other words, specific measures were not set out for each age group. The majority of these steps have not been implemented yet because the new government coalition has been primarily focused on reducing public expenditure.

Summary

The Czech government perceives population ageing as a serious issue; particularly in relation to the sustainability of the pension system. The current reforms relate to pension system funding and raising the retirement age for both men and women. Although the concept of an ageing workforce is not particularly part of the public discourse, in practice there are measures in place that support older workers.

According to the representative of the largest employers' organisation, age management as a strategic policy will become more relevant to employers when they experience labour shortage. This was also confirmed by a case study undertaken for this project in the media sector, where there is concern over the recruitment of qualified workers in certain positions. It was perceived that there was a shortage of candidates with adequate skills levels, which led the company in the case study to establish age management as a core part of its human resources policy. In other sectors and/or periods of excess of labour supply over demand, companies tend not to introduce age management or focus their human resources policies on specific age groups.

An expert within the Czech-Moravian Confederation of the Trade Unions said the trade unions have some concerns about the absence of adequate support for older workers, especially in the context of government policy raising the retirement age. They are mainly concerned with the rise in unemployment of older workers, which may develop into long-term unemployment with related serious socioeconomic consequences for both individuals and society. This is due to the fact that the rise in retirement age has not been accompanied by measures improving labour market conditions for older workers and their employment.

List of interviewees

Karel Petrželka, Deputy Head of the Employer's Relationship Department, Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic (SP ČR)

Jiří Biskup, Head of Social Insurance Department, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MPSV)

Pavel Janičko, Analytical expert, Czech-Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions (ČMKOS)

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EF/11/75/EN 6