



DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION TIPS TOOLS INSIGHTS PRACTICES

In practice

THE CZECH REPUBLIC TRANSITION PROGRAMME PROMOTES HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Key messages

A strong civil society is crucial for countries transitioning to democracy. The Czech Republic draws on its own experience in this area to support human rights activists, independent journalists and political prisoners in other countries. It has learned that coupling such grassroots support with international action is more effective.

Keywords

[Civil society](#) | [Crises, fragility and humanitarian assistance](#)

Key partner

[Czechia](#)

Challenge

As more countries move towards authoritarianism, human rights are under threat. Civil society is vital to strengthen democracy, but helping local human rights activists, independent journalists and political prisoners is complex. The Czech Republic capitalises on its own experience with totalitarianism, and the transition to democracy to help other countries facing the same challenges.

Approach

The Czech Republic created the [Transition Promotion Programme](#) in 2005 to support six themes:

- civil society, including human rights defenders
- freedom of expression and information, including freedom of the media
- equal and full political and public participation
- institution building in the area of the rule of law
- equality and non-discrimination
- human rights in employment and in the environmental context.

The programme targets 11 countries: Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Myanmar, Cuba and Viet Nam. Its annual budget was about EUR 4 million in 2022.

Czech civil society organisations (CSOs) have cultivated relationships with grassroots initiatives in these countries which has allowed the Czech Republic to combine support to human rights activists on the ground with international action.

Results

- **Support to human rights activists has helped raise awareness in politically constrained settings.** In Cuba, Czech CSOs helped activists deepen their skills in oral-historical methods, and more than 200 testimonies have been published. In Myanmar, they supported training for progressive lawyers and regional parliamentarians. In Georgia, they used documentary films to educate hundreds of youth members of national minorities about human rights and media literacy.
- **At the international level, the Czech Republic has leveraged its first-hand knowledge of human rights violations to support political prisoners.** Czech CSOs and Ukrainian grassroots initiatives have worked together to publicise the names of imprisoned activists and journalists from occupied territories. These names have been published in EU statements and in the UN Human Rights Council. International publicity puts pressures on Russia to release them. The Czech Republic has also provided emergency fast-track visas or long-term residence permits to those in need.

Lessons learnt

- **Establishing long-term relationships between Czech CSOs and local grassroots initiatives enables the Czech Republic to access first-hand information on human rights violations and take action in international fora.** Combining local and international action is made possible by the fact that two key units co-operate closely within the Department of Human Rights and Transition Policy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). One implements the programme locally, while the other manages human rights issues at the international level.
- **Engaging with CSOs as partners, rather than implementers, increases the impact of the MFA.** Some Czech CSOs act as guarantors in the Czech governmental visa program called “Civil Society” helping Human Rights defenders and independent journalists. Others provide information on human rights in non-democratic countries to the MFA.
- **Adjusting programmes to the needs and contexts of CSOs is key.** Responding to the demands of its partners is the cornerstone of the Czech approach. To that end, it supports different types of civil society activities, in size and type, both in cities and remote provinces.
- **However, there are missed opportunities to better integrate the Transition Promotion Programme with development co-operation.** Although the Czech Republic considers human rights as a cross-cutting priority for all development co-operation, the transition programme is a standalone programme managed outside of the Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance Department. While the programme has 11 priority countries, development co-operation has 6, and they have only 3 countries in common (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova and Georgia). Even if the transition programme operates in difficult environments where dialogue with governments may not be possible, development cooperation could further benefit from the expertise of the transition programme.

Further information

MFA (2015), in *Human rights and transition promotion policy concept of the Czech Republic*, www.mzv.cz/public/98/7c/e8/2239165_1648851_Human_rights_and_transition_promotion_policy_concept_of_the_Czech_Republic_.pdf

OECD resources

OECD (2023), *OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Czech Republic 2023*, (forthcoming).

OECD (2023), *Funding Civil Society in Partner Countries: Toolkit for Implementing the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9ea40a9c-en>.

To learn more about the Czech Republic's development co-operation, see:

OECD (2023), "Czech Republic", in *Development Co-operation Profiles*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/4e4c3092-en> (accessed on 27 July 2023).

See more *In Practice* examples from Czech Republic here: <https://www.oecd.org/development-cooperation-learning/?tag-key+partner=czech+republic#search>

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