

Strategy to support small and medium-sized enterprises in the Czech Republic 2021-27

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGY/ACTION PLAN

 CZECHIA

Timeline



ID number 41959

Background

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have an irreplaceable position in terms of the growth of the Czech economy, job creation and the introduction of innovative technologies. In addition to their significance for economic development, at regional level they also greatly impact the cultural and social situation. They help shape the local environment, strengthen interpersonal relationships and contribute to community cohesion. At the same time, however, they are extremely sensitive to economic fluctuations and struggle to cope with the mismatch between the skills that are available, and those skills required in the labour market. Therefore, it is vitally important to support SMEs and this support is one of the national strategic priorities.

At present, Czechia is going through a number of changes that have an impact on the labour market and the requirements placed on entrepreneurs and employees. At the same time, innovations and technological progress associated with digital transformation bring about a series of new opportunities and areas of business. A prerequisite for taking advantage of these new opportunities is the creation of appropriate conditions within initial and continuing education.

When addressing the issue, it is necessary to take into account that the labour market will see new trends associated with the deepening digitalisation of the economy; interconnecting the labour market and the education system through the cooperation of all stakeholders at different levels is a *conditio sine qua non*.

Objectives

The strategy to support SMEs contributes to the development of seven key areas, one of which is workforce, skills and education. Specific objectives are:

- (a) developing the skills of students in line with the requirements of the labour market by supporting the establishment and strengthening of appropriate forms of cooperation between schools and businesses and increasing the quality, efficiency and relevance of training for future professions;
- (b) providing further education, particularly in the area of key skills through further

training for employees and businesses and increasing the level of digital skills in the business sector.

Description

Strengthening cooperation between companies, especially SMEs and schools, will be implemented by means of promoting and organising joint events. The strategy also promotes organising of students' work placements and internships in businesses. There will be shared workshops, shared classrooms and training centres established for the teaching of technical subjects and youth education in respect of Industry 4.0. The strategy supports instructor training by practical training providers (certification as well as creation of methodological materials). Emphasis is being placed on strengthening individual (career) counselling and support links between students and specific businesses.

Within the area of further education, support will be provided to the recognition of competences acquired in different contexts which will enable individuals to have their competences recognised and to acquire full or, where relevant, partial qualifications. Lifelong learning programmes that can effectively reflect the needs of the labour market will be developed, e.g. for third-age universities. Sufficient financial support will be secured for SMEs to educate employees further on key competences. Emphasis will be placed on supporting the development of specific consulting services for SMEs and start-ups/scale-ups (business, marketing, legal, managerial, etc.) with the involvement of the newly created national and regional innovation infrastructure. The strategy also supports the education institutions that offer further education for employees and businesses and ensure adequate quality in the provision of education services. Attention will be paid to the training of employees in connection with the introduction of new technologies in companies and to the support of innovation infrastructure actors that can contribute to the development of skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship (e.g., science and technology parks, innovation centres, digital innovation hubs).

2021 Approved/Agreed

The Government approved the strategy on 11 March 2021.

2022 Implementation

In 2022 the Vocational Education Council was established. It has 19 members, headed by the education minister. The MŠMT continues to strongly support cooperation between employers and schools. In 2022, the draft of the so-called standard in the company and school workplace was completed, which will support the conditions for the implementation of practical training. Within the framework of Operational Programme Technologies and Applications for Competitiveness (OP TAK), the preparation of the call for the activity 'Support for cooperation between schools and companies' was launched in 2022, which aims to support through vocationally oriented SMEs the performance of practical teaching of students of partner secondary schools and practical training of students of partner upper secondary and tertiary professional schools at the workplace of SMEs, as well as the presence of students of partner schools at another vocational courses and training directly in enterprises.

At the same time, the call for proposals to submit simplified grant schemes for secondary and tertiary professional schools was announced under the Operational Programme Johannes Amos Comenius (OP JAK). One of the activities of the call is the possibility of personal support in the form of the position of Coordinator of cooperation between schools (secondary schools, colleges) and employers.

2023 Implementation

Following the call for proposals to submit simplified grant schemes for secondary and tertiary professional schools titled 'Templates for Secondary and Tertiary Professional Schools I', announced in 2022 under the Operational Programme Johannes Amos

Comenius (OP JAK), 358 secondary schools and 61 tertiary professional schools opted for the position of coordinator (to support cooperation between schools and employers). The budget for this initiative is 2 000 million CZK, with a timeframe running from May 2022 until 31 May 2023. This call supports the appointment of coordinators and also provides funding for their salaries.

In 2023, 102 projects were supported within the Operational Programme Just Transition (OP TAK) under the 'Cooperation between Schools and Companies' calls. This measure aims to support instructors for practical training at work sites (education, certification, methodological materials). As of 2023, 26 participants received certificates of professional qualifications for instructors of practical training at a work site (within the National Register of Qualifications), totalling 42 successful graduates holding certificates of professional qualification.

2024 Implementation

In July, a call for Regional Education Centres supported by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan was announced, with a budget of CZK 490 million (approximately EUR 20.3 million) and a timeframe set until 31 October 2025. The aim is to create a network of at least 14 training centres managed by the Labour Office of the Czech Republic (ÚP ČR), working in cooperation with regional experts, schools and other relevant institutions (e.g. through memoranda or contracts on cooperation). The centres will be equipped with modern technology (e.g. simulators) to provide continuous education and consultancy. From a systems perspective, this initiative will introduce a new element to expand possibilities for both standard retraining and technical training tailored to Industry 4.0 needs. The capacity of schools can also be used beyond this, for example, to provide basic skills. If secondary schools or universities are involved, it will also be possible to exploit synergies in linking initial and continuing education, i.e., by tapping the free capacity of schools to share the same facilities, materials, and lecturers/teachers for both initial and continuing education.

The technological equipment in each centre will be determined according to specific priorities and educational needs of each region, aligned with the needs of Industry 4.0 (outputs of ESF projects, e.g., KOMPAS, and particularly Competence 4.0 will be utilised), including the needs of employers.

In October 2024, a call for proposals for secondary and tertiary professional schools from the Operation Programme Jan Amos Komenský was announced and remains open until November 2025. Schools can apply for position of Coordinator of cooperation between schools and companies. The overall allocation for the call is CZK 2 billion (approximately EUR 82.8 million).

No call for proposals was announced in 2024 for measures supporting organisations providing professional internships and work placements for students in companies (measure no. 2). Eighty companies were supported under calls for proposals for cooperation between schools and companies from the Operational Programme Technologies and Applications for Competitiveness (OP TAK), with this cooperation involving 1 080 participants in educational events. Furthermore, in 2024, six new holders of the Practical Training Instructor certificate were certified.

2025 Implementation

In 2025, the development of the Regional Education Centres moved from preparation to implementation, building on the 2024 call financed under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan. The aim is to expand the offer of retraining and digital courses, whose importance in the labour market is constantly growing. The Labour Office plans to support more than 110 000 participants in digital education by September and to establish education centres in every regional capital. Each centre will cooperate with a local school. The first pilot partnership is with the Secondary Technical School and Gymnasium (SSPŠ) in Prague.

In February 2025 the Czech Labour Office, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports,

and the Smíchov Secondary Technical School and Gymnasium (SSPŠ) signed a Memorandum of Cooperation to support the school's involvement in digital education. SSPŠ is a school with many years of experience in information technology and cyber security. Its students are involved in the development of applications, augmented reality, robotics, and web technologies, and actively participate in educational projects. As part of the pilot programme, the school will train and certify selected students as digital course instructors under the expert guidance of teachers, delivering courses for the Labour Office at their school/Regional Education Centre.

The Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic, together with the OECD, completed an extensive evaluation of policies for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which ran from June 2024 to June 2025 and was funded by the European Technical Support Instrument.

The aim of the project was to assess the existing SME support system in Czechia and verify its relevance in relation to the current geopolitical and economic situation across seven key areas identified in the Strategy for the Support of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises for the period 2021-2027: business environment, access to finance, market entry, skills development, digitalisation, research, development and innovation, and low-carbon economy.

During the project, OECD experts, together with the Ministry of Industry and Trade and representatives of other ministries, organisations, and associations (Government Office, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Czech National Bank, National Bank of the Czech Republic, Association of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, Capital Market Association, Czech Chamber of Commerce, Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic, CzechInvest, CzechTrade, and others) met at a series of meetings in Prague to map in detail the impacts of the current strategy, which was developed before the COVID-19 pandemic and the energy crisis of 2022.

The result is an in-depth evaluation of the implementation of the Strategy for the Support of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in the Czech Republic for the period 2021-2027, including proposals for measures for the coming years. These proposals respond to the changed macroeconomic conditions and focus primarily on improving SMEs' access to finance, supporting innovative projects, and developing digital systems, with the aim of increasing their productivity and contributing to the long-term sustainable growth of the Czech economy.

The Ministry of Industry and Trade, in cooperation with the OECD organised a joint seminar on June 19, 2025, focused on presenting the results of the mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the Strategy for the Support of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the Czech Republic for the period 2021-2027.

The seminar focused on key areas such as access to finance for businesses, the quality of the business environment, support for research, development, and innovation, digitisation, the transition to a low-carbon economy and resource efficiency, as well as market access, labour, skills development, and education.

The OECD gave a positive assessment of the current strategy, particularly noting its links to other national and European strategies. At the same time, however, it recommended reducing the fragmentation of support resources. It also praised the steps taken to reduce the administrative burden on businesses and develop e-government, but according to the OECD, there is still room for improvement in both areas.

As of October 2025, there are 55 holders of the Practical Training Instructor qualification.

Bodies responsible

- Ministry of Industry and Trade

Target group

Learners

Adult learners
Persons in employment, including those at risk of unemployment

Education professionals

Trainers

Entities providing VET

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

Thematic categories

Modernising VET offer and delivery

Acquiring key competences
Integrating digital skills and competences in VET curricula and programmes
Reinforcing work-based learning, including apprenticeships

Teachers, trainers and school leaders competences

Systematic approaches to and opportunities for initial and continuous professional development of school leaders, teachers and trainers

Subsystem

CVET

Further reading

[The Strategy for the support of SMEs on the website of the Ministry of Industry and Trade](#)

[Mid-term evaluation of the Czech SME Support Strategy](#)

Related policy developments

2022 Completed

Mapping future competences as part of systemic measures for defining labour market requirements - Competences 4.0 project

In the framework of the Competence 4.0 project (2019-22; Operational programme Employment, Ministry of Industry and Social Affairs), the Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic, Czech Chamber of Commerce and the consultancy company TREXIMA jointly participate in mapping new future competences

 CZECHIA

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2024 Completed**National artificial intelligence strategy of the Czech Republic**

The NAIS follows up on and meets the objectives of the Government Innovation Strategy 2019–30 and is linked to the Digital Czech Republic programme. It was inspired by similar foreign strategic documents concerning AI and support for the digitisation of the industry and services.

**Type of development**Strategy/Action
plan**Subsystem**

IVET CVET

2025 Implementation**Qualification requirements for trainers in companies**

Recommendations issued by the education ministry in 2016 on agreements between VET schools and enterprises for in-company training of learners stipulate that a professional qualification and necessary experience are mandatory features of these contracts.

**Type of development**Practical
measure/Initiative**Subsystem**

CVET

2025 Approved/Agreed**Reinforcing cooperation between schools and employers**

The Amendment to the School Act, which came into force in September 2017, obliges schools to develop, with regard to the field of study, efforts to support cooperation with employers towards joint fulfilment of the objectives of secondary education.

**Type of development**

Regulation/Legislation

Subsystem

IVET CVET

“ ” Cite as

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). Strategy to support small and medium-sized enterprises in the Czech Republic 2021-27: Czechia. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2025 update) [Online tool].

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/41959>