

REPORT

LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES FROM THE CZECH REPUBLIC: COVID-19



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Protecting Freedom

2020

EUROPEAN VALUES THINK-TANK

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SUMMARY

The fight against the COVID-19 pandemic is a global one. That means that various countries in the world are facing similar, if not identical, challenges and problems.

The Czech Republic entered this fight a few moments and stages earlier than other countries in Eastern Europe, like Ukraine and Georgia, among others.

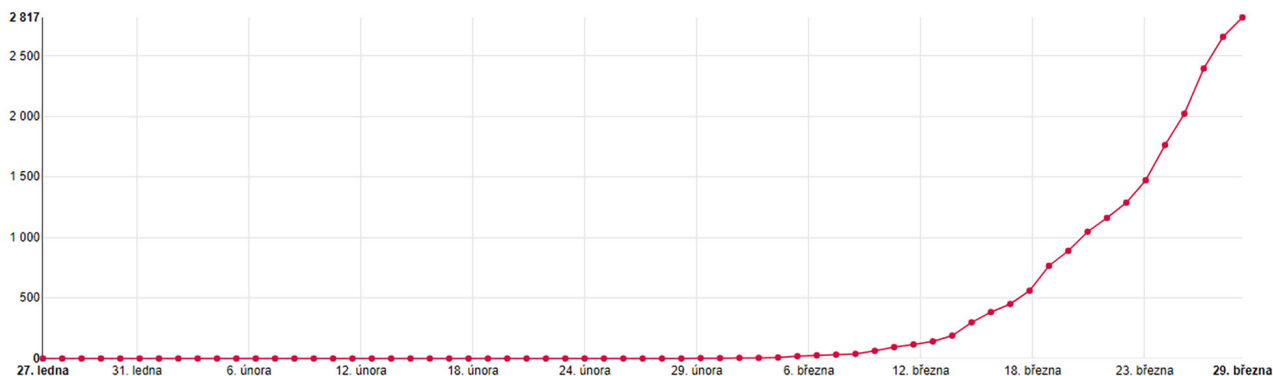
Czech civil society (in the broader understanding of this term) has already shown a high degree of innovation, creativity, voluntarism, and solidarity when it comes to the fight against this disease.

We believe that there is no need for others to reinvent the wheel and waste precious time in the face of a potentially fatal disease. Therefore, we decided to compile the best practices and lessons learned by Czech civil society and offer them as this shareware toolkit to other countries.

THE CUMULATIVE NUMBER OF PEOPLE INFECTED (AS OF MARCH 29, 2020)

Celkový (kumulativní) počet osob s laboratorně prokázaným onemocněním COVID-19 dle hlášení krajských hygienických stanic a laboratoří

Přehled za posledních 14 dní | [Kompletní přehled za celé období](#) | Tabulkový přehled

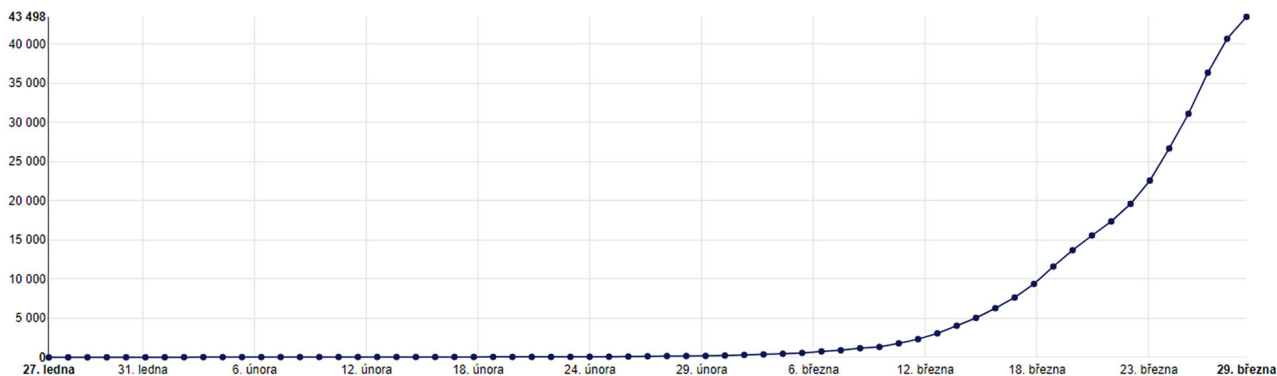


Source: Ministry of health, <https://onemocneni-aktualne.mzcr.cz/covid-19>

THE CUMULATIVE NUMBER OF TESTS CONDUCTED (AS OF MARCH 29, 2020)

Celkový (kumulativní) počet provedených testů (včetně opakovaných testů u stejné osoby)

Přehled za posledních 14 dní | [Kompletní přehled za celé období](#) | Tabulkový přehled



Source: Ministry of health, <https://onemocneni-aktualne.mzcr.cz/covid-19>








The Czech Republic, together with Slovakia and Slovenia, are the only countries in Europe, where citizens are obliged to wear protective face masks on the public.



1. GOVERNMENT'S MEASURES AND RESPONSE

The [measures introduced by the Czech government](#) are among the toughest ones in Europe. For example, the Czech Republic, together with Slovakia and Slovenia, are the only two countries in Europe, where citizens are obliged to wear protective face masks on the public.

The following timeline explains the growth and responses by political institutions:

						
MARCH 1 ST	MARCH 12 TH	MARCH 13 TH	MARCH 14 TH	MARCH 16 TH	MARCH 19 TH	MARCH 24 TH
FIRST INFECTED PERSON REPORTED	THE STATE OF EMERGENCY WAS ANNOUNCED	FULL-TIME EDUCATION IN ELEMENTARY, SECONDARY AND TERTIARY EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES, AS WELL AS UNIVERSITIES, ARE FORBIDDEN ALL SPORT, CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS AND OTHER ACTIVITIES BOTH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ENCOMPASSING MORE THAN 30 PERSONS ARE NOT ALLOWED RESTAURANTS, SHOPS, SHOPPING MALLS (EXCEPT OF GROCERIES, PHARMACIES, PETROL STATIONS AND VERY FEW OTHER TYPES OF BUSINESSES LIKE REPAIRS) ARE CLOSED TEMPORARY REINTRODUCTION OF INTERNAL BORDERS WITH GERMANY AND AUSTRIA FREE MOVEMENT IS LIMITED WITH THE EXCEPTION OF TRAVEL TO AND FROM WORK AND NECESSARY TRAVELS TO ENSURE BASIC HUMAN NEEDS THE ACCESS TO THE CZECH REPUBLIC FORBIDDEN FOR ALL FOREIGN NATIONALS, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF FOREIGN NATIONALS WITH PERMANENT RESIDENCE OR TEMPORARY RESIDENCE CZECH CITIZENS ARE FORBIDDEN FROM DEPARTING THE COUNTRY			ALL PERSONS NEED TO BE EQUIPPED WITH A FACE MASK OR OTHER COVERING OF THE NOSE AND MOUTH WHILE OUTSIDE OF THEIR RESIDENCE	NO MORE THAN TWO PEOPLE CAN GATHER ON THE PUBLIC

2. CZECH CIVIL SOCIETY RESPONSE

Czech civil society, encompassing more than CSOs, has responded effectively, flexibly, and creatively.

a) The main areas of civic engagement focused on outreach to the following groups and employed the following strategies:

- assistance to elderly people mainly with shopping;
- assistance to various professional groups engaged at the frontline: healthcare staff, rescuers, firemen, policemen, staff of grocery stores;
- assistance to other socially or economically disadvantaged groups (homeless people);
- assistance to foreigners;
- coordination of various voluntary groups and initiatives;
- information services and compilation of FAQ about COVID-19;
- provision of various services (legal, education, psychological, IT solutions, healthcare);
- production of necessary personal protective equipment (masks, respirators);
- provision of proper and up-to-date information, debunking fake news;
- support of positive general societal mood, solidarity and morale.

b) The main non-state actors involved:

- NGOs;
- voluntary groups including also famous signers, actors, athletes, musicians, and other creative arts groups;
- public media.

c) Activities of various actors:

- Assistance to elderly people and other socially vulnerable groups

SKAUTI SPOLU (SCOUTS TOGETHER) AND ELPIDA

The Scouts are delivering groceries and other household necessities to elderly people who are immobile and must stay at home. They are also helping them with arranging various administrative matters. The NGO Elpida runs a free-of-charge hotline to connect scouts with elderly people to help them meet their needs.

www.skautskapomoc.cz

SOUSEDSKÁ POMOC (NEIGHBORHOOD ASSISTANCE)

This is the nationwide online platform that links people in need (especially the elderly and ill people, who cannot leave their homes) and volunteers who are ready to assist the former ones in a concrete city or location. The platform facilitates services such as shopping, the purchase and delivery of pharmaceuticals, and sewing protective masks for these people in need.

For more information: www.sousedskapomoc.cz, info@sousedskapomoc.cz

PRAHA DRŽÍ SPOLU (PRAGUE STICKS TOGETHER)

This hotline, launched by local authorities in Prague and its individual districts alongside a handful of NGOs that reach out to elderly or socially excluded people.

The hotline provides consultations, practical information related to the coronavirus, psychological support, and practical assistance with social services (shopping, provision of masks, pharmaceuticals, walking dogs, and enabling postal services).

For more information: http://www.praha.eu/jnp/cz/o_meste/magistrat/tiskovy_servis/akce_a_kampane/prahadrzispolu/index.html

PEOPLE IN NEED

This NGO maintains a large portfolio of initiatives and projects that have been put into operation during the coronavirus crisis. It is worth mentioning their program for people endangered by indebtedness and facing debt trap that has been exacerbated by falling personal incomes due to restrictions on economic activity in the country.

The telephone helpline for people facing debt problems has been further strengthened. For more information:

<https://www.clovekvtisni.cz/dluhove-poradenstvi-reaguje-na-dusledky-koronavirove-krize-lidem-dokazeme-pomoci-i-nyni-6481gp>

Next to these new initiatives, most conventional charity and humanitarian NGOs (such as [Caritas](#) or [Diakonie](#)), which also provide social services to socially excluded and vulnerable groups (especially homeless people), have quickly mobilized and started to organise volunteers as well as public actions such as sewing masks, providing services to elderly citizens.

Caritas, for example, has launched [a special telephone line offering assistance for foreign \(migrant\) workers](#).

- **Production and distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE)**

COVID19CZ

This is an informal group mainly of IT experts, companies, and high-tech universities that is offering innovative solutions to manage COVID-19. This initiative has been one of the most

- successful crowdfunding campaigns. They have been able to raise around €500.000 for their innovative solutions within a few days. Some examples of their products:
- production of PPE for medical staff. These masks, respirators, and protective shields is produced locally by members of this IT community using their own 3D printers;
- the launch of the new 1212 emergency phone line dedicated to coronavirus- related questions; Powered by artificial intelligence, it replaced the service that used state-operated hotlines (112 and 150) that collapsed due to a high call volume;
- a mobile information card application for Android and iOS that provides regularly updated basic information about the COVID-19 situation, featuring the most important phone numbers and a chat function ;
- www.stopcovid.cz, a social media awareness campaign assisted and supported by the Ministry of Health);
- Initiative Corovent (www.corovent.cz), an initiative that produces innovative, homemade, open source ventilators sold at a fraction of the market price. It has launched a public crowdfunding campaign that has raised enough money to manufacture around 500 ventilators;
- CovidHacks (www.covidhacks.org), an English-language resource for the Covid19cz project, which develops relief operations assistance inspiration also to other countries and including potential cooperation.

For more information: www.covid19cz.cz, www.covidhacks.org

CZECH TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY (ČVUT)

A special project at the ČVUT has begun to produce protective masks on 3D printers. Their mask is designed for use in the clinical settings where exposure to the coronavirus is the highest. This gear is sterilised and disinfected according to a stringent procedure for repeated use and is critical for the protection of the lives of doctors and other front-line workers coming in contact with people who are under suspicion of or have been proven to have COVID-19. The project offers the respective license for free to all those who are fighting COVID-19.

For more information: <https://rp95.cz>

POMÁHÁME 2020 (WE ARE HELPING 2020)

This is the platform created by Czech PPE producers. Here, they gather various proposals of PPE producers with the objective to provide Czech authorities with maximum amounts of PPE produced locally.

They share production technologies and other industrial production hints and tips, coordinate the supplies of production materials as well as the distribution of the final products.

For more information: <https://www.pomahame2020.cz/>



There are numerous of voluntary initiatives that are sewing protective face masks all around the country.

SEWING PROTECTIVE MASKS

There are numerous (hundreds if not thousands) of voluntary initiatives that are sewing protective face masks all around the country. Some of their innovative solutions include:

- mask-trees: masks are hung by volunteers in publicly-accessible places, on trees, or similar edifices, where anyone who needs a mask can pick one.
- vending machines with masks (“rouškomat”): selling sterile masks for a small fee., the people in need can buy a sterile mask.

Another group, Dáme roušky (let’s make masks), activates volunteers who sew masks or provide tailors with necessary textiles or distribute masks among various organisations and institutions with sewed masks.

For more information: www.damerousky.cz, damerousky@gmail.com

d) Assistance to doctors, nurses and other medical staff:

#ENERGIILEKARUM (ENERGY FOR DOCTORS’ CAMPAIGN)

Initiators of this campaign aim at the provision and distribution of “energy packages” to medical staff (doctors, nurses) at hospitals. These packages contain different food products with necessary nutritious parameters, vitamins.

Ordinary citizens can become donors of these packages (through various crowdfunding platforms and social media), which are then distributed by volunteers to the hospitals. Donors can then follow online the path of their packages to concrete medical workers.

www.energiilekarum.cz, info@energiilekarum.cz, jan.lukacevic@gmail.com (initiator)

SESTRY V ZÁLOZE (NURSES ON THE RESERVE LIST)

This is an initiative of former nurses, who have left this profession, but now would like to help in hospitals and other medical institutions. The initiative then does proper matching of former nurses and concrete medical institutions that need this type of personnel.

Both nurses as well as respective medical institutions can register through the online database. Up to now, there are more than 1500 registered former nurses ready to help.

www.sestryvzaloze.info, renata.dubcova@sestryvzaloze.info (initiator and main coordinator)

e) Information campaigns, debunking of fake news:

CZECH RED CROSS

The Red Cross has launched a public information and awareness campaign called “We will manage it together” (#zvladnemeto). The objective of this campaign is to provide basic information and practical advice related to the coronavirus - on PPE, hygiene standards, nutrition, sports activities, how to talk to children about the virus, how to spend time under quarantine, etc.

Information produced under this campaign is shared by volunteers on social media as well as other platforms.

Alongside this dedicated campaign, the Red Cross also provides a number of other services - production of protective face masks and assisting the elderly- and currently have more people willing to volunteer than those who actually need assistance.

<https://zvladnemeto.cervenykriz.eu/>

CZECH ELVES

These fighters against fake news and disinformation initiated a new campaign of debunking hoaxes and fake news related to coronavirus, which has predominantly targeted the elderly due to its distribution through chain letters.

This campaign, called #Pošli Babičce (send it to your grandma), distributes to all subscribers e-mails with debunked fake news, which the recipients can then forward to their grandparents.

<https://cesti-elfove.cz/kampan-poslibabicce/>

f) Education:

• Czech public media (especially TV)

CZECH PUBLIC TV LAUNCHED TWO SPECIAL BROADCASTING PROGRAMS:

As of 23rd March, a brand-new TV channel dedicated to pensioners, offering them retro-style popular programs, films and TV shows, has been launched. The objective is to entertain elderly people staying at home under quarantine with their favourite TV shows from the past.

- <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/10000000408-naladte-se-na-ct3/>

Every other day, there is online teaching dedicated to children, who are preparing for their high school entry exams.

- Učitelka ("TV Teacher") – new, live, interactive broadcasting for school pupils, 45 minutes dedicated to various subjects (for example maths and Czech language) substituting regular school classes.
- <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/13394657013-ucitelka/>

The public TV company has also launched and runs the new initiative.

- ČT pomáhá ("Public TV helps") - a public charity Facebook group which is matching requests for help and assistance of those in need with those who could be either potential donors (of medical equipment, teaching tools, etc.) or could provide the necessary services (to the elderly or to children by, for example, online reading of stories or providing accommodation).
- <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ct24pomaha/>

• Publishing houses

It is also worth noting that a number of publishing houses specialising in printing school textbooks and who run online courses for both primary and secondary schools have started to offer their online teaching tools free of charge for both teachers and pupils.

g) Support of high morale, positive public mood:

CZECH SINGERS

Several popular singers, bands and musicians have recorded special songs and TV spots dedicated to COVID-19. Here are two of the most popular recordings:

- Rather a patriotic song titled "[You cannot give it up](#)" (665 thousands views within one week) with the message that the Czech people have had to face similar tough challenges before, featuring unknown heroes like doctors, firemen, policemen and others from the frontline. The clip was recorded at several historical sites linked with key moments of Czech history.

- A song called “[Put on a mask](#)”, promoting the wearing of protective face masks, was recorded following the requirement to wear them in public was announced, since then it has received 1.535 million views. The song features several popular bloggers, influencers and youtubers and is, as such, targeting the younger generation.

Another popular “singing” campaign was launched by popular actors and musicians Svěrák & Uhlíř, whose songs have become popular among all age groups, though initially written for children.

On 24 March at 12:30pm their most famous song “Není nutno” (“It’s not important”) was streamed all over the country by several TV stations, commercial radio stations, public announcement systems, and sang by people at work and public places. Several hundred people participated in this flash mob with the hashtag #neninutno. A website has been created and public singing all over the country will be repeated with other popular songs.

<https://neninutno.cz/>

ATHLETES

Numerous popular athletes recorded short, entertaining and instructive videos with examples of physical exercises that can be done at home under quarantine. Some of them launched public crowdfunding campaigns aimed at helping hospitals and other medical institutions be equipped with PPE.

Famous hockey players and experts recorded a short video, in which they introduced the team of the month (a regular activity). They selected a doctor, a nurse, a fireman, a soldier, a shop worker, a policewoman, whom they publicly thanked for all their efforts to combat coronavirus.

<https://www.hokej.cz/spolecne-to-zvladneme-extraligovi-hraci-dekuji-sestave-mesice/5047641>

All these activities have ran under the hashtag #spolecnetozvladneme (#wewillcopewithittogether).

#KULTURAŽIJE (CULTURE IS ALIVE)

Various theatres, singers, musicians and other performers are participating in this campaign, whose objective is to provide online streaming of theatre performances and concerts to compensate for the closure of cinemas, theatres, music halls and cancelation of concerts, festivals and other cultural events.

Contact: Various initiatives using the abovementioned hashtag #kulturažije.

Another inspiring initiative was presented by The Czech National Ballet, which, whilst quarantined, cannot perform. Instead, they have recorded an entertaining video from their homes titled “We will dance through it”.

h) Others:

GOOD CORONA IDEAS

This is a Facebook group, where various useful tips, initiatives, hints and advice related to the coronavirus are shared.

www.facebook.com/groups/koronapady

NEW THINK TANK KORONERV-20

Top Czech intellectuals and academic professors (mainly economists) established this think tank, which should be working out social and economic strategies for the post-corona period.

Small and micro breweries organised themselves and created a special website with a map where people can buy local beers. They want to ensure at least a certain level of sales.



ZACHRANPIVO.CZ (SAVE CZECH BEER) :-)

This is a campaign of small and micro breweries aimed at ensuring at least a certain level of sales. Due to the restrictive measures related to COVID-19, these small businesses have been left without the ability to sell their produce, which can easily spoil and thus could threaten them with heavy financial losses and even bankruptcy.

Breweries have therefore organised themselves and created a special website with a map where people can buy local beers.

<https://zachranpivo.cz/>

3. GOOD PRACTICES & FAILURES OF CZECH AUTHORITIES/ GOVERNMENT RESPONSES

a) Good practices:

- online daily statistics (# of infected people, tests, deaths, recoveries) with basic information about the virus as well as a list and contact details of testing facilities – <https://onemocneni-aktualne.mzcr.cz/covid-19>;
- appointment of an experienced epidemiologist as the head of the national crisis centre, with key coordination and policy-making competencies, who has been treated and perceived even by politicians as a professional authority;
- Gradual introduction of smart quarantine (similar to South Korea, Japan, Singapore) allowing the tracing of infected people. This smart quarantine, that could eventually ease other restrictive measures, has been first piloted in one region with the aim of implementation throughout the country;
- early preparation and mobilisation of dedicated hospitals and medical staff (including the activation of medical students) aimed at the provision of sufficient medical care when the peak of the spread of COVID-19 is reached;
- early and timely introduction of restrictive measures (limited free movement of people with exception of travel to work and doing basic shopping, cancelation of public events);
- introduction of economic and social packages by the government aimed at easing the economic and financial burden on individuals as well as companies suffering the most during the COVID-19 crisis.

b) Failures:

- delayed launch of the national crisis centre, which was not automatically activated;
- the lack of centralised purchases of equipment and materials needed (protective masks, ventilators, etc.), rather chaotic purchases of these items by various government and public agencies at both national and regional levels;
- late distribution of protective medical gear and equipment among workers at the frontline;
- the launch of massive purchases of PPE from China with clear geopolitical agenda aimed at the whitewashing of China while ignoring other foreign aid and domestic proposals of assistance from Czech companies and other stakeholders. This practice leads to geopolitical dependence and commitments;
- chaotic and non-systematic announcement of supportive measures for SMEs;
- lack of appropriate stratcom and crisis communication, especially at early stages. Ministers and other top state officials were communicating on their own, often with the objective of self-promotion. There was initially no single communication platform informing the public about

- introduced restrictive measures;
- no instructions were given in due time to retirement homes and other social service providers on how to protect and handle the care of their clients during the COVID-19 crisis.