

Czech Republic - country profile

1 General background and who's who. In 2019, an informal “Sustainability in Libraries” working group was set up within the Masaryk University project [Social Innovation in Libraries](#), 2017-2020; the information officer of the UN Information Centre Prague is one of the founding members. Its main goal is to raise awareness on the roles played by libraries in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to build capacities and knowledge base to further increase their impact. Czech librarians feel indeed that SDGs are not implemented in libraries, but that they should become a priority, since they are already a core concern of the European Union priority and of the Czech national government.

Moreover, the Library Development Strategy 2021—2027, a national strategic plan (adopted by the government in July 2020) is directly linked with the Strategic Framework Czech Republic 2030 — the basic state administrative document for sustainable development and the improvement of the quality of life of population. This strategy introduces libraries as pillars of civil society and natural community centres, education supporting institutions and curators of cultural and knowledge wealth. The project “from libraries to libraries” financed by the Czech Ministry of Culture under the VISK1 programme, helps libraries share know-how and examples of good practice with regard to their societal role. Finally, 2021 was chosen by the Association of Library and Information Professionals of the Czech Republic (SKIP) to be the Year of Sustainability in Libraries.

2 SDG priorities and policies in Czech libraries. SKIP (The Czech Association of Library and Information Professionals of the Czech Republic) considers the following SDGs relevant for libraries in the Czech Republic:

- SDG 3. Good Health and Wellbeing: Better, more accessible health systems to increase life-expectancy,
- SDG 4. Quality Education: Inclusive education to enable upward social mobility and end poverty,
- SDG 10. Reduced Inequalities: Reducing income and other inequalities, within and between countries,
- SDG 12. Responsible Consumption and Production: Reversing current consumption trends and promoting a more sustainable future,
- SDG 17. Partnerships for the Goals: Revitalize strong global partnerships for sustainable development.

SDG-oriented projects should therefore be focused on:

- Debates on SDGs with citizens,
- Library collections, library exhibitions,
- Projects in co-creation with partners/citizens (digital inclusion; digital citizenship),
- Pursuing green library objectives (such as energy saving infrastructure, waste management, SDG policy with staff).

3 SDG-oriented projects

- a. **“Start Life with a Book” — improving reading literacy¹ (SDG 4).** Until recently, only a handful of Czech libraries offered special services to babies, toddlers and preschool children and their parents or caregivers. Although the overall literacy rate in the Czech

¹ <https://librarymap.ifla.org/stories/keywords/czechia>

Republic basically reaches 100%, the PISA 2015 international survey clearly indicated that Czech students — compared to those from other OECD countries — were achieving below average results in reading literacy.

Therefore, the Association of Library and Information Professionals of the Czech Republic started a project in 2018 called “Start Life with a Book” (S knížkou do života). It was inspired by the original Bookstart project founded by BookTrust in the United Kingdom in 1992 with follow-ups in various European countries. Its goal is to show parents of young children how reading is important for their children’s intellectual and emotional development and, consequently, future employment.

The Association has provided all participating libraries with a standard package to be given to the parents. Every library adds a free library card or a voucher to get one and can add any other items it considers fit for purpose, such as folding picture books or suitable toys. In the first year of the project, libraries received the package for free; starting from the second year, it can be purchased for a modest fee. The packages are distributed to parents at various occasions, most commonly the occasion of welcoming new-born citizens by the local authorities, at special events taking place in libraries or at maternity wards in hospitals.

An impressive number of 140 libraries have joined the project so far. As a result, libraries strengthened their links with local authorities and developed partnerships with local charities, and companies. The gift packages have been sponsored mostly by the Association’s partners, especially private enterprises but also by the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic. Every participating library is expected to organise a minimum of four events for the children and their parents per year, which include activities such as reading, storytelling, creative activities, and movement. It is also expected that facilities such as baby feeding areas or changing stations are available — these can take a variety of forms, always depending on financial resources and space available.

According to a survey conducted in November 2018, 97% of libraries participating in the project report that parents and their children are interested in taking part in the future events. In many libraries, book clubs for parents with children under the age of five have been set up. During 2018, the participating libraries gave away approximately 10,000 packages. Apart from parents and children, the project has been acknowledged by politicians, especially from the Senate. In 2018, it received an award from the Czech Minister of Culture.

b. Public libraries team up with primary schools to increase reading literacy² (SDG 4, 17).

In the 2006 PISA survey — which tests 15-year-old students from all over the world in reading, mathematics and science — Czech pupils ranked only 21 out of 56 participating countries in reading skills. Therefore, supporting reading literacy has become an important issue for many stakeholders, including libraries and schools.

Ivana Hutařová, an active member of the Club of Children’s Libraries, a division of the Association of Library and Information Professionals of the Czech Republic (Svaz knihovníků a informačních pracovníků České republiky), came up with the idea of a project called “I am already a reader — Book for First Grader”. The project, which started in 2008, brings together libraries and schools to develop reading habits of primary school first-graders (age 6 to 7).

² <https://librarymap.ifla.org/stories/keywords/czechia>

As part of the project, the children's section of public libraries organise events for school children, including library tours, reading sessions for both adults and children, meetings with book writers and illustrators, book discussions, and exhibitions. The number of events varies by library and number of school classes involved. For all children who participate in the events there is something extraordinary to look forward to — a book prepared exclusively for them. Every year a brand new (previously unpublished) book title for children with original illustrations is produced which is not made available for sale for at least three subsequent years. So far, more than 250,000 pupils have received the book.

In the past, the project was financially supported by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic and schools reached out to local libraries to collaborate in the project. Since 2011, the financing and implementation of the project is being organised through the Association. The partnership principle has been reversed; libraries undertake a more proactive role and it is now their initiative to get in touch with schools and work on the project together.

The number of project participants is increasing from year to year; in 2018, more than 500 libraries and over 800 schools were participating. Working together towards the common goal has strengthened partnerships between local libraries and schools.

This project is an important example of how libraries, through strengthened partnership with schools, can contribute to achieving the country's educational goals.

- Many other SDG-oriented library activities are included in an ad hoc website,³ which support the implementation of SDGs in libraries.

c. Libraries lend books, but you can have fun and learn (SDG 3, 4, 11, 12, 16, 17). Libraries offer breakfasts, leisure universities, community gardens, folklore and local traditions. Within library premises you can create, realise a project, learn how to program, play chessboard, meet new people or just sit with a book or a magazine. Through their activities, libraries develop all of the eight key competences for lifelong learning defined by the European Reference Framework.

"What the library can do" is a website offering a map of specific community and educational activities throughout the Czech Republic and all types and sizes of libraries. Originated by the programme Social Innovations in Libraries funded by the ESF for the years 2017-2020, the project was supported by the European Union under the Employment Program. Its continuation and development is funded by the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic under the VISK1 program for 2021 in the project Library Development Strategy: from methodology to practice (16033/2021 OULK-OLK).

d. Library Development Strategy 2021-2027 (with a view to 2030) — national strategic plan (adopted by the government in July 2020), prepared under the Ministry of Culture (3, 4, 11, 12, 16, 17). Libraries are designated as:

- pillars of civil society development and natural centres of communities,
- educational and education-based institutions,
- guardians of cultural and knowledge based wealth.

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- Activities for librarians consist of:
- year-round educational cycle for libraries on SDGs, officially supported by UN Information Centre Prague, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Environment and Czech Commission for UNESCO,
 - developing a knowledge base in [Trello notice board](#) and a [website](#),
 - networking libraries which are interested in the SDG topic: map of libraries, [Facebook page](#) and [group](#),
 - networking with other organisations and stakeholders: [KUMU map of topics, initiatives and inspiration](#),
 - sharing know-how and [examples of good practice](#).

Several libraries offer breakfasts, leisure universities, community gardens, folklore and local traditions. Within library premises you can do something you like, you can realise a studio project, learn how to program, play chessboard, know new people or just sit with a book or a magazine.

4 Funding sources and evaluation. There is no unique source of information for funding SDG-related activities. The bulk of libraries launch SDG-oriented projects through their own budget; some of them are able to use additional funding, which is normally provided by ministries, city/provincial/regional councils, national or international Foundations, non-governmental organisations. The budget is normally originated within the cultural agencies or cultural departments within ministries, local agencies, foundations or NGOs.

The Masaryk University project Social Innovation in Libraries, 2017-2020 is possibly the only library project which has received funding from the EU.